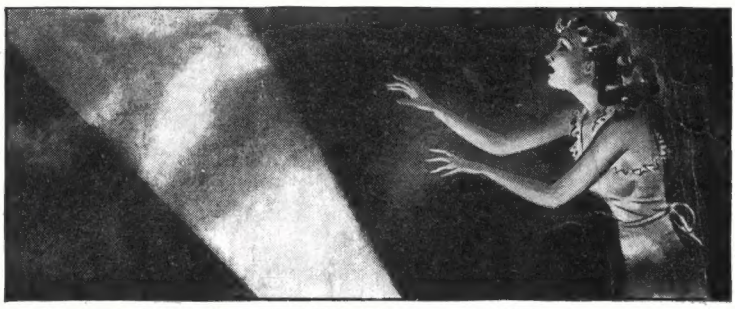
10¢
COMPLETE QUICK-TRIGGER STORIES
POPULAR
MAR.
WESTERN
PAINTED POST BOOTY
A Sheriff Blue Steele Novelet
By TOM GUNN
BULLET HARVEST
A Novelet of Killer Heritage
By C. WILLIAM HARRISON
GUN JUDGMENT
A Bank Holdup Story
By EDGAR L. COOPER
A THRILLING PUBLICATION

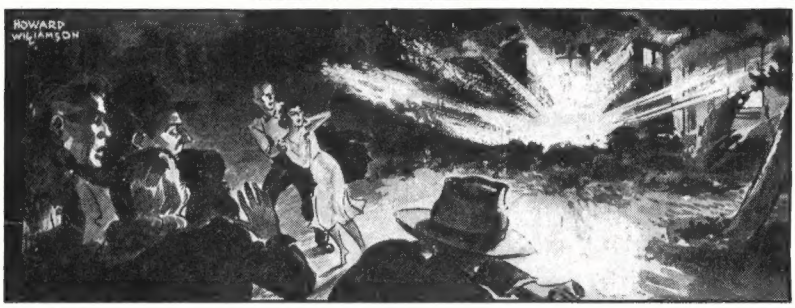
"I WAS TRAPPED IN A BLAZING INFERNO!"

A true experience of MRS. LILLIAN POKEDOFF, *Brooklyn, N. Y.*

"AN OMINOUS, CRACKLING NOISE awoke me the first night I was visiting in a strange farmhouse," writes Mrs. Pokedoff. "Choking and coughing from smoke, I groped for the bedroom door and staggered out into the hall.

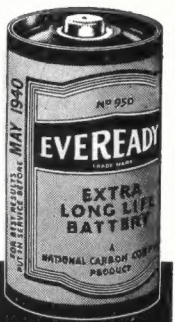
"IN THE THICK, BILLOWING SMOKE I couldn't locate the stairway. Then I heard a muffled shout from below and a beam of light bored through the darkness, showing me the way to safety.





"I STUMBLED DOWN THE STEPS just in time—for a kerosene tank exploded and the house burned to the ground! I sincerely say that I owe my life to those powerful and dependable 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries!

(*Signed*) (Mrs.) Lillian Pokedoff"



FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... *Look for the* DATE-LINE

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

Unit of Union Carbide UCC *and Carbon Corporation*

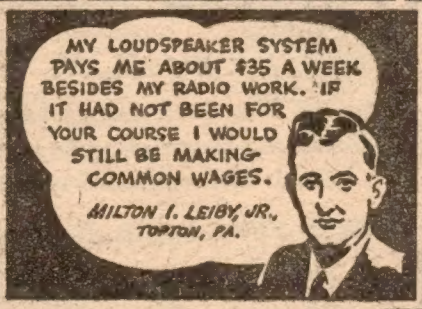
Read How These Men Got Better Jobs
THEN FIND OUT WHAT RADIO OFFERS YOU Mail Coupon

AFTER COMPLETING 20 LESSONS I OBTAINED MY RADIO BROADCAST OPERATOR'S LICENSE AND IMMEDIATELY JOINED STATION WMPC WHERE I AM NOW CHIEF OPERATOR.
HOLLIS F. HAYES
327 MADISON ST., LAPEER, MICH.

I WAS WORKING IN A GARAGE WHEN I ENROLLED WITH N.R.I. I AM NOW RADIO SERVICE MANAGER FOR M..... FURNITURE CO. FOR THEIR 4 STORES.
JAMES E. RYAN
1543 SLADE ST.
FALL RIVER, MASS.

N.R.I. TRAINING HELPED ME GET AND HOLD MY JOB. I AM NOW IN CHARGE OF THE RADIO DEPARTMENT FOR THE AMERICAN AIRLINES AT CLEVELAND.
WALTER B. MURRAY
AMERICAN AIRLINES, MUNICIPAL AIRPORT, CLEVELAND, OHIO.

THANKS TO N.R.I. TRAINING I AM FOREMAN IN A RADIO FACTORY. I AM MAKING MORE MONEY AND HAVE TWO N.R.I. STUDENTS HELPING ME.
OTTO CLIFFORD
313 W. SEMINARY ST.
CHARLOTTE, MICH.


MY LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEM PAYS ME ABOUT $35 A WEEK BESIDES MY RADIO WORK. IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR YOUR COURSE I WOULD STILL BE MAKING COMMON WAGES.
MILTON I. LEIBY, JR.
TOPTON, PA.

I EARN $10 TO $25 A WEEK IN SPARE TIME AND ALWAYS HAVE PLENTY TO DO. ONLY TRAINED MEN CAN FIX RADIO SETS NOWADAYS. I OWE MY SUCCESS TO N.R.I.
WILLIAM F. RUPP
611 GREEN ST.
BRIDGEPORT, PA.

I will Train You at Home for RADIO *and* TELEVISION

Radio is a young, growing field with a future, offering many good pay spare time and full time job opportunities. And you don't have to give up your present job to become a Radio Technician. I train you right at home in your spare time.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

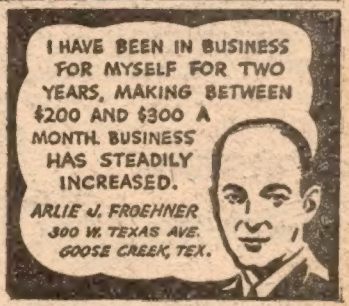
Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and service men. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, Commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N.R.I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

Many Make $5, $10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your course I send plans and directions which have helped many make $200 to $500 a year in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio Offers You Mail Coupon Below

Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page Book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Course in Radio and Television; shows many letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard—NOW!


I HAVE BEEN IN BUSINESS FOR MYSELF FOR TWO YEARS, MAKING BETWEEN $200 AND $300 A MONTH. BUSINESS HAS STEADILY INCREASED.
ARLIE J. FROEHNER
300 W. TEXAS AVE.
GOOSE CREEK, TEX.

J. E. Smith, President
Dept. OCO9, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

MAIL NOW · Get 64 page book FREE

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. OC09,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out Radio's opportunities and tells how you train men at home to be Radio Technicians. (Write Plainly.)

Name..... Age.....

Address .....

City..... State.....

EVERY STORY BRAND-NEW

POPULAR WESTERN

VOL. XVIII, NO. 2 | CONTENTS | MARCH, 1940

A Complete Blue Steele Novelet

PAINTED POST BOOTY

By TOM GUNN

Sheriff Blue Steele and Deputy Shorty Watts Swap Lead with Drygulching Coyotes when Buried Loot Goads Killers into a Stampede of Lawlessness! 14

Other Full-Length Novelets

BULLET HARVEST . . . . . C. William Harrison 54
They Called Jim Lannert Yellow—but a Girl's Taunting Voice Made Him See Flaming Red!

GUNSMOKE ON THE RANGE . . Charles N. Heckelmann 86
Back to a Rangeland Where His Name Means Death, Curt Mason Returns to Sweep the Town Clear of His Father's Ambushers!

Quick-Trigger Short Stories

WHIPSAW . . . . . Cordwell Staples 34
Red Cody Matches His Guns Against Rustler Guile

A DRIFTER DARES BOOTHILL . . . . Gunnison Steele 44
A Wandering Waddy Risks Death for the Sake of an Oppressed Girl

SIX-GUN CLEANUP . . . . . Sam Brant 71
Tom Dawson Rips the Mask off Murder as Six-Guns Roar!

GUN JUDGMENT . . . . . Edgar L. Cooper 74
A Passel of Bank Robbers Menace the Peace of Bosque County

Special Features

THE GENERAL STORE . . . . . Swap Department 6
FIGHTING COURAGE (Verse) . . . Tex Mumford 51
THE HOME CORRAL . . . . . Old Doc Trail 104

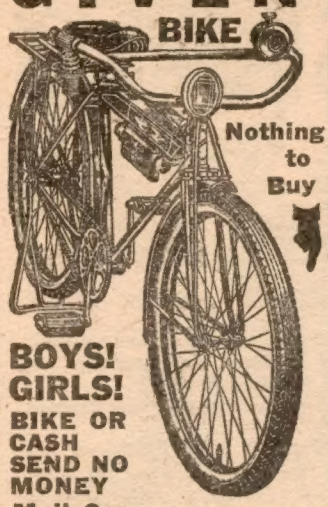
Join Our Club for Readers! See Coupon on Page 108

POPULAR WESTERN, published bi-monthly by Better Publications, Inc., at 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription yearly, $.60; single copies, $.10. Foreign and Canadian, postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter March 21, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1940, by Better Publications, Inc. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

Read our Companion Magazines: Thrilling Western, Texas Rangers, Thrilling Ranch Stories, G-Men, Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Thrilling Adventures, Thrilling Sports, Thrilling Love, Thrilling Mystery, West, The Lone Eagle, Sky Fighters, The Phantom Detective, Popular Detective, Popular Sports Magazine, Popular Love, Detective Novels Magazine, Everyday Astrology, Masked Rider Western Magazine, Black Book Detective Magazine, Range Riders, The Rio Kid Western, Thrilling Spy Stories, Strange Stories, Captain Future, The Ghost, and Startling Stories.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

GIVEN



BOYS! GIRLS!

BIKE OR CASH SEND NO MONEY

Mail Coupon

Fully equipped—Balloon tires and all. Nifty!—THIS Bike, Cash or choice of other marvelous premiums given. — SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE good size beautifully colored famous Art Pictures with our well known White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE, used for chaps, mild burns, shallow cuts, etc. Salve easily sold to friends, relatives, and neighbors at 25c a box (with favorite picture FREE). Remit and select premium as explained in premium catalog. 45th year. We are fair and square. Many friends and customers waiting to buy! Act Now! Mail Coupon! Salve and pictures sent postage paid. **WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. TG-31-A, TYRONE, PA.**

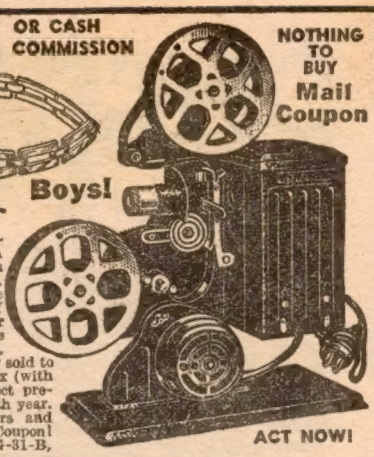
BOTH GIVEN

OR CASH COMMISSION

NOTHING TO BUY Mail Coupon

Ladies! Girls!

Boys!



Big Movie—Adjustable lamp socket—Special bulb—Shows good size picture. A Whiz! Lovely little watch about size of a dime. A beauty! EITHER Movie Machine, Wrist Watch, Cash or choice of other fine premiums Given.—SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE good size beautifully colored popular Art Pictures with our well known White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE used for chaps, mild burns, shallow cuts, etc. Salve easily sold to friends, relatives and neighbors at 25c a box (with favorite picture FREE). Remit and select premium as explained in premium catalog. 45th year. We are fair and square. Many customers and friends waiting to buy! Act Now! Mail Coupon! WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. TG-31-B, TYRONE, PA.

ACT NOW!

BOTH GIVEN

Nothing to Buy Mail Coupon

Send No Money — Boys! Girls! Ladies! Phonograph plays 10" records. Complete. Beautiful Wrist Watch. Wonders!—EITHER Phonograph, Watch, Cash, or other delightful premiums given—SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE good size beautifully colored famous Art Pictures with our well known White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE used for chaps, mild burns, shallow cuts, etc. Salve easily sold to friends, relatives, and neighbors at 25c a box (with wonderful picture FREE). Remit and select premium as per catalog. 45th year. Many customers and friends waiting to buy! Act Now Mail Coupon! WILSON CHEM. CO., INC. Dept. TG-31-C, TYRONE, PA.

GIVEN

NOTHING TO BUY! SEND NO MONEY!

BOYS!

Iver Johnson Bolt Action 22 Cal. Self-Cocking Safety RIFLE—22" long. STURDY! THIS RIFLE, Cash, or choice of other valuable premiums given—SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE good size beautifully colored famous Art Pictures with our well known White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE used for chaps, mild burns, shallow cuts, etc. Salve easily sold to friends, relatives, and neighbors at 25c a box (with wonderful picture FREE). Remit and select premium as explained in premium catalog. 45th year. We are fair and square. Don't delay. Act Now! Mail Coupon! WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. TG-31-D, TYRONE, PA. MAIL COUPON

GIVEN

NOTHING TO BUY

Send No Money

GUITAR

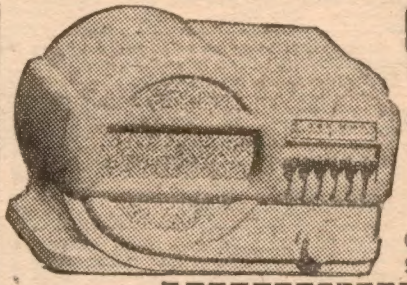
or Cash

BOYS GIRLS

MAIL COUPON

Big Standard Size regulation GUITAR. It's a Dandy! THIS Guitar, Cash or choice of other valuable premiums given—SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE good size beautifully colored famous Art Pictures with our well known White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE used for chaps, mild burns, shallow cuts, etc. Salve easily sold to friends, relatives and neighbors at 25c a box (with wonderful picture FREE). Remit and select premium as explained in premium catalog. 45th year. We are fair and square. Many customers and friends waiting to buy. Act now! Mail Coupon! Salve and pictures sent postage paid.

WILSON CHEM.CO., INC. Dept. TG-31-E, TYRONE, PA.



GIVEN

NOTHING TO BUY

SEND NO MONEY

MAIL COUPON

RADIO OR CASH

Set to Left

Six position—Automatic Tuning—Superhet AC-DC-GET THE NEWS! This Radio, Cash or choice of other wonderful premiums GIVEN — SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE good size beautifully colored popular Art Pictures with our well known White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE used for chaps, mild burns, shallow cuts, etc. Salve easily sold to friends at 25c a box (with favorite picture FREE). Remit and select premium per catalog. Mail Coupon. WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. TG-31-H, TYRONE, PA.

MAIL COUPON

WILSON CHEM. Co., Inc.

Tyrone, Pa. Dept. TG-31, Date.....

Gentlemen: Please send me 12 beautiful art pictures (with 12 boxes White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE to sell at 25c a box (giving favorite picture FREE). I will remit within 30 days, select a premium or keep cash commission as per new premium plan catalog sent with order, postage paid.

NAME .....

Rd or

BOX NO..... ST.....

TOWN..... STATE.....

Print Your Last Name Only in Spaces Below:

WRITE, or PASTE COUPON on a POSTAL CARD or MAIL COUPON in an envelope TODAY!

HERE'S where you can exchange something you have but don't want for something someone else has that you do want. This is a FREE service.

For example: if you have a camera and don't use it, and would like to have a stamp album, write: "Have Eastman camera, No. 1, Jr., make, 3 years old, good condition, will exchange for stamp album with 3,000 stamps, 25 countries.—John Smith, 49 Park St., Albany, N. Y."

Please limit your request to 25 words. No goods for sale listed, nor requests concerning firearms or any illegal articles.

Type or hand-print clearly, in submitting announcements. POPULAR WESTERN will not be responsible for losses sustained. Make very plain just what you have and just what you want to "swap" it for. Enclose a clipping of this announcement with your request. Address: General Store, POPULAR WESTERN, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.

Stamps in album (4,000), Duplicate U. S. foreign stamps, tenor guitar with steelplate. Exchange for U. S. or foreign coin. Paul Bohm, 985 Broadway, North Bergen, N. J.

Wanted: Correspondents interested in exchanging stamps. N. C. Hurrell, 9 Nelson Street, New Brighton, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Will exchange postcards or stamps. Florence Roy, 780 Gervais, 3 Rivieres, P. Quebec, Canada.

Trade complete Atlas Tension Course for gasoline washing machine motor or farm battery set radio. Write first. William Hall, R. R. 1, Metamora, Ill., c/o Geo. Klein.

Wrist watch, tattoo outfit, electric engraver, sandwich toaster, keyring identification tag outfit, kneeboots. Send anything value 25c for sample key tag with your name. Geo. Hill, 4021 North Florissant Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

Send Liberty head nickel for 100 foreign stamps. Want coins, stamps, first-day covers. Have almost anything you want. James Cope, 503 Bell Ave., Lawton, Okla.

Will swap airport dedication and 1st flight covers for profit sharing coupons. Send your lists to Joseph Palmer, 901 East 95th Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Thousand stamp hinges for 50 good stamps foreign or United States. Daniel Graveline, Farmington, Mich.

For every Indian head penny or United States large cents sent me you will receive 35 foreign (different) stamps. Want other coins, medals, souvenirs. Malvin Flayburn, 78 Canal Street, Stamford, Conn.

Have foreign coins, flashlights, books and postcard views for United States coins, Indian relics, oxen shoes and powder horns. All letters answered. Kenneth Queen, Box 12, Silt, Colo.

My guitar, expensive novels, records, camera, oil burner, stamps, souvenirs from the World's Fair. What do you have to offer? Chris Asche, 154 East 106th St., New York City, N. Y.

Swap United States commems. on equal basis, with collectors in foreign countries only. Jim Anderson, 643—51st St., Oakland, Calif.

For each United States one cent piece dated before 1880, I will send a three cent piece in return. Have stamps, match covers and post card views to trade for same. M. L. Manis, 417 Main St., Huntington Beach, Calif.

I will trade cowboy belt or binoculars for twenty 1909 or 1914 pennies. Harold Tillerman, Box 421, Chinook, Mont.

Have electric trains, extra equipment, toys, games, camera, projector, stereoscope, radioptican, electric shaver, others. What have you? M. Epstein, 2953 Ruckle, Indianapolis, Ind.

Want to exchange stamps with correspondents in foreign countries. Will correspond in Spanish or English. F. S. Goldthwaite, R. D. 3, Box 5, Punxsutawney, Pa.

Would like to have electric train, tracks, transformer and accessories. Have one 20 meter transmitter. Victor Frederick, Sterling, Kansas, Route 1.

Have 1800 different foreign stamps mounted in album to trade for United States album, also will consider other offers. Write now to Charles Hoffmaster, Jr., 1218 Elm Street, Reading, Pa.

Exchange postage stamps any amount. Write and make offers. Frank Valik, 1231 Second Avenue, Schenectady, N. Y.

Stamps. Send 100, 200 or 500 different and three cents postage. Receive same number of mine in return. H. F. Oliver, Crane, Mo.

Have Indian relic stone hammer, accordion, violin and complete photographers' dark room set. What have you? Lester Clark, Box 84, Parshall, No. Dak.

Send me 100 or 200 different foreign stamps and I will send you the same. Have U. S. to trade with collectors in foreign countries. Wm. Vasko, 6 Holdstock Place, East Hartford, Conn.

Swap several high class magical illusions of a retired magician for better class of commemorative pictorial stamps. Write to Quinton, 1835 Piedmont Road, Atlanta, Ga.

Will swap Australian Commonwealth and commems. for stamps of an English speaking country. Any quantity up to 100. John Greaves, 2C Renwick Street, Leichhardt, Sydney, Australia.

Who wants to swap postcards, folders and snaps? I have snaps of Texas Centennial, postcards of Mexico, also snaps and cards of Texas. Prefer foreign exchange. Mrs. Mildred Bilbrey, 1503 Monroe St., Wichita Falls, Tex.

Most anything wanted—no junk, however. Have various tools and other items. My list for yours. George C. Reynolds, Rear 760 Lathrop St., New Castle, Pa.

Have taxidermy course to trade for miniature camera or typewriter. James Claude, 646—5th Avenue, Port Arthur, Tex.

Have collection of old books, some very old editions in fair condition. Will exchange for watch, camera, or musical instrument. Burle Rowe, 817—15th Street, Parkersburg, W. Va.

IMAGINE THEIR JOY

WHEN THEY FOUND THEY COULD PLAY

This easy as A.B.C. way!

Learned Quickly at Home

I didn't dream I could actually learn to play without a teacher. Now, when I play for people they hardly believe that I learned to play so well in so short a time.

* H. C. S., Calif.

Wouldn't Take $1,000 for course

The lessons are so simple that any one can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course.

* S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.

Plays on Radio

I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio station. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course.

* W. H. S., Alabama.

Surprised Friends

I want to say that my friends are greatly surprised at the different pieces I can already play. I am very happy to have chosen your method of learning.

* B. F., Bronx, N. Y.

Best Method by Far

Enclosed is my last examination sheet for my course in Tenor Banjo. This completes my course. I have taken lessons before under teachers, but my instructions with you were by far the best.

* A. O., Minn.

What Instrument Would You Like To Play?

JUST name your instrument and we'll show you how you can learn to play it—quickly, easily, in spare time at home. Never mind if you don't know one note of music from another—don't worry about "special talent." And forget all you've ever heard about music's being hard to learn.

The truth of the matter is that *thousands now play who never thought they could!* Yes, men and women everywhere have discovered this amazingly easy way to learn music at home. Now they are enjoying the thrilling satisfaction of playing the piano, violin, guitar, saxophone or other favorite instruments. Some of them are playing in orchestras and over the radio; others are teaching music, making money in spare or full time. And thousands are having the time of their lives playing for their own enjoyment and the entertainment of their friends.

It all came about when they wrote to the U. S. School of Music for the Free Booklet that shows you how EASY it is to learn music at home this modern way. No tedious study and practice, no tiresome exercises. You learn to play *by playing*—start right in almost at once with the melody of a simple tune! It takes only a few minutes a day and the cost is trifling; you save the expense of a private teacher. Does it sound too good to be true? Mail the coupon and get the FREE BOOKLET that gives all the facts. (Our forty-second year—Est. 1898.) U. S. School of Music, 2942 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. C., N. Y.

SEND FOR FREE BOOKLET

● You'll open your eyes when you find how quickly and easily you can learn to play your favorite instrument. Don't doubt; don't hesitate. Send for the fascinating illustrated booklet that answers all your questions; that explains how easily and quickly you can learn your favorite instrument as thousands of others have done. If interested, mail the coupon, NOW. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.)

**Actual pupil's names on request. Pictures by professional models.*

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC
2942 Brunswick Bldg., New York City, N. Y.

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home."

Piano	Hawaiian Guitar	Clarinet
Violin	Banjo	Trombone
Guitar	Mandolin	Flute
Piano Accordion	Ukulele	Piccolo
Plain Accordion	Cornet	Organ
Saxophone	Trumpet	Drums and Traps
Cello	Harp	Modern Elementary Harmony
		Voice Culture

Have You
Name.....This Instru?.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Fascinating, Profitable Profession

NOW OPEN to More Men & Women

If you are looking for a NEW and BETTER way to make a living, take up Swedish Massage, for now you can learn at home. This interesting big pay profession was for years available only to a few. Its secrets were guarded jealously and fabulous prices were paid for instruction. This same instruction is now available to you at a mere fraction of the former price and you need not leave your present work until you have qualified as an expert and can command an expert's pay. The demand for BOTH MEN AND WOMEN has shown a steady increase and few, if any, have ever lacked employment.

LEARN IN 90 DAYS AT HOME

Use spare time at home to master a profession which has made thousands of dollars for ambitious men and women. Many graduates have completed their training in three months but you can take your own time, it need not interfere with either work or pleasure. All instruction has been prepared by the teachers in our famous resident school—the same material is used and a DIPLOMA is awarded upon graduation.

ANATOMY CHARTS AND BOOKLET FREE
No Obligation Of Any Kind SEND COUPON

THE COLLEGE OF SWEDISH MASSAGE (Successor to National College of Massage), Dept. 663 — 30 E. Adams St., Chicago

You may send me FREE and postpaid, Anatomy Charts, booklet, containing photographs and letters from graduates and complete details of your offer.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

High School Course at Home — **Many Finish in 2 Years**

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work — prepares you for entrance to college. Standard H. S. texts supplied — Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H-358, Drexel, at 58th, Chicago

NEVERLIFT IRON REST and Universal Cord Control

Iron "slides on" and "slides off" this modernistic rest. Saves lifting iron over 200 times each ironing day—more than 900 lbs. Cord control prevents electric cord from kinking. Keeps it up out of way. Fire proof and safe.

AGENTS
Make lots of money—big money—easy money selling this device. 100% profit and up. Write for particulars —NOW.

NEVERLIFT COMPANY INC.
6001-BU Woodlawn Ave. Chicago, Ill. U.S.A.

WANTED ORIGINAL SONG POEMS

any subject. YOU CAN write the words for a song. Don't delay—send us your poem for immediate consideration.

RICHARD BROS., 74 Woods Building, Chicago, Ill.

Cleans Cars NEW WAY!

AGENTS! Hot Seller!

REVOLUTIONARY chemical sponge cleans cars like magic! Banishes auto-washing drudgery. Cleans linoleum, woodwork, windows like a flash! Auto owners, housewives wild about it. *Agents making phenomenal profits!* SAMPLE OFFER—Samples sent ON TRIAL to first person in each locality who writes. No obligation. Get details. *Be first—send your name TODAY!* THE KRISTEE CO., 1451 Bar Street, Akron, Ohio

The Smash Event of the Year!

THE TERRIBLE TENDERFOOT

An Action-Packed Epic of the West—the Latest and Greatest Novel by

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

CREATOR OF "TARZAN"

•

America's Most Popular Author At His Best

•

Beginning in the March Issue of

THRILLING ADVENTURES

ON SALE EVERYWHERE 10c AT ALL STANDS

MEN and WOMEN WANTED

NOW YOU DON'T HAVE TO SEND ONE PENNY TO GET THIS BIG MONEY MAKING OUTFIT

IT'S FREE!

OWN A FINE PAYING NEIGHBORHOOD FOOD ROUTE

If you want to better yourself—if you want cash to spend—money to save—the means to live in comfort—let me show you your big chance! To an honest, reliable man or woman in any open locality I will give—FREE—everything needed to start a fine paying neighborhood Food Route, with profits your very first day and all year 'round. You don't send me one penny! You must realize that I certainly would not offer this big expensive Outfit FREE unless I had complete confidence in the splendid money-making opportunities of my remarkable Plan!

You need absolutely no experience. My simple, proven Plan offers you a wonderful opportunity to make good money right from the start in a simple, dignified business of your own. You handle fast-selling, quick repeating home necessities—things people must buy, such as coffee, teas, delicious foods and over 100 other necessities—all guaranteed to satisfy or money back. Your home is your headquarters. You have no investment for store rent, light, fixtures or big stocks of goods. You handle all the money and keep a liberal share for yourself. In fact, your average gross profit is from 30 to 40 cents on every dollar you take in. Once you start, under my liberal credit plan, you can operate on my capital.

Splendid Cash Profits

You owe it to yourself to write and see what wonderful success so many others have enjoyed with this time-tested money-making Plan. Let me mail you full particulars—then you can judge whether you want to start right in making money at once.

I Send Everything

I not only give you free the Complete Outfit shown here, containing a big assortment of full-sized packages, but also give you a simple, sure-fire Plan. I give you advertising material, trial-size samples to give away, and everything else you need to start earning money your very first day.

Get Full Particulars!

This is a sincere offer made by a big, reliable, old-established company operating from Coast to Coast. Write at once for full particulars. Unless you take advantage of my remarkable Free Outfit Offer now, you may be missing the very money-making opportunity you have been looking for. Strike out for yourself! Be independent! Make money! Enjoy life! Remember—you don't send me a penny. Just fill out and send the coupon and I will mail you full particulars. Do this TODAY!

RUSH COUPON for FREE OFFER

Mr. E. J. MILLS, President
1608 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Without the slightest obligation on my part please mail me full particulars about your offer of a Complete Free Outfit, and how you will help me get started at once in a fine-paying neighborhood Food Route.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

E. J. MILLS, Pres., 1608 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, O.

GET RELIEF FROM YOUR

RHEUMATISM

ARTHRITIS OR NEURITIS WITH

HOT SULPHUR BATHS

In Your Home. Like Natural Hot Sulphur Baths

Here at last, benefits similar to the world-famous natural Hot Sulphur Baths—never before possible at home—can now be yours with SULFURAID-21. Try this marvelous new scientific achievement on our money-back guarantee. Send us your order for the Full Course of 21 SULFURAID baths. If, after giving them a thorough test, you are not relieved of your aches and pains, return the unused part of the treatment, with the empty vials, and YOUR MONEY WILL BE REFUNDED.

You simply empty ONE vial of SULFURAID-21 in a tub of hot water and let Nature do the rest. That is all. Results will speak for themselves. You will be delighted.

So why suffer any longer when the blessings of Hot Sulphur Baths can be yours at a fraction of what it costs to take them at the leading Spas of America and Europe? Write for our FREE booklet. Tells how nature's secret of the ages was solved for all mankind to enjoy.

Mail your order at once. The Full Course of SULFURAID, consisting of 21 vials, costs $10.00. 10 vials, $6.00. **Trial offer of 3 vials, $2.00.** Send check, cash or money order to **BAER LABORATORIES, Inc., Desk VM, 30 East 20th Street, New York City.**

HIDDEN WEALTH MAY BE YOURS

If you know what to look for in old coins. We pay big cash prices for wanted coins. Certain 1909 cent, $10; some silver dollars, $4,000; 1864, 1865 Indian head cents, $100 each; dimes before 1895, $600; liberty head nickels before 1914, $500; encased postage stamps, some large pennies, $2,000; half cents, $275; paper money, gold dollars, $1,500; foreign coins, $165; some worth $6,000 each. It will pay you to be posted. Send 15c today for big illustrated catalog. National Coin Corporation, Uninc. (7) Daytona Beach, Fla.

NEW ASTROLOGY JEWELRY!

Matched to your birth sign. Mysterious. Beautiful. Accents your personality. May bring you luck! Star design, or Locket Brooches. FREE Gift Box and Astrological Analysis. Postpaid. Send $1.00 and Birthdate TODAY! Money back guarantee. **ASTRA, American Products, Dept. TG-1, P. O. Box 655, Indianapolis, Ind.**

Thompson BEATS the World on BOATS

Better Built—Lower Prices

Canoes, Rowboats, Outboard Motor Boats, Olympic, Snipe, Comet and Sea Gull Sail Boats

CATALOG FREE

Save Money—Prompt Shipment—Two Factories.

THOMPSON BROS. BOAT MFG. CO. (83)

253 Ann St., PESHTIGO, Wis. (Write to either place) 183 Elm St., CORTLAND, N. Y.

Read Our Companion Magazine

TEXAS RANGERS

Now On Sale **10¢** At All Stands

LIGHTS ITSELF

SELLS ITSELF

Quick Action (1940) Perfected **Self Starting Lighter**

Lights cigar, cigarette or pipe—instantly. Never fails. IMPROVED PRINCIPLE IN IGNITION. No flint. No friction. Send 25c for sample and large can of fluid. Start now. Agents report big earnings.

NEW METHOD Mfg. Co.

Mfrs. of No Flint Automatic Gas Lighters

Box TG-87, Bradford, Pa., U. S. A.

Lights Easily in the Wind

Packed in DISPLAY BOX

25c Retail

Doz. $1.75

Gross $18.00

The Texas Rangers Ride Again!

MEET "EL HACON" THE HAWK OF THE RANGERS, IN

KNIGHT OF THE SILVER STAR

By

BRADFORD SCOTT

•

The Most Glamorous Western Story You Ever Read!

•

IN THE MARCH

THRILLING WESTERN

NOW ON SALE 10¢ AT ALL STANDS

Meet the West's Most Famous Pioneers

in

Our New Companion Magazine

THE RIO KID WESTERN

NOW ON SALE 10¢ AT ALL STANDS

CANDID CAMERA CATCHES CO-EDS

In Every Issue of

COLLEGE HUMOR

•

GAYER AND GRANDER THAN EVER

15c

AT ALL STANDS

BEST COMICS

The Biggest and Best Magazine of Comics for All the Family

Now on Sale 10c At All Stands

STAY

a wage-slave IF you wish

BUT-

DON'T you wish you were like some of your friends who are forging ahead while you stay put? Like it or not, people size you up by what you earn. Is their sizing flattering to you? —Why not *plan* to get ahead, to make more money, to get a raise? If you don't know how, perhaps we can aid you as we have so many others. Chances are good that we can help you *boost yourself up* in ways you never thought of. —Thousands will gladly tell you how our planned training helped them—directed their work along *charted* paths to business success, bigger earnings, 10%, 20%, 50%, some even 100% and 200% greater income . . . At any rate, let us send you the inspiring book "Ten Years' Promotion in One." It's FREE! It will surely help you *plan* your next raise whether you ask us to *help* you plan or not. Write us today for the book—the coupon is for your convenience.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A Correspondence Institution

Dept. 8329-R Chicago

Please send me full information regarding the training and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of "Ten Years' Promotion In One," all without obligation to me.

- ☐ **Business Management:** Training for Official Managerial, Sales and Departmental Executive positions.
- ☐ **Modern Salesmanship:** Training for position as Sales Executive, Salesman, Sales Coach or Trainer, Sales Promotion Manager, Manufacturers' Agent, Solicitor, and all positions in retail, wholesale or specialty selling.
- ☐ **Higher Accountancy:** Training for position as Auditor, Comptroller, Certified Public Accountant, Cost Accountant, etc.
- ☐ **Traffic Management:** Training for position as Railroad, Truck or Industrial Traffic Manager, Rate Expert, Freight Solicitor, etc.
- ☐ **Law:** LL. B. Degree.
- ☐ **Stenotypy:** The up-to-date method for secretaries and court and convention reporters.
- ☐ **Modern Foremanship:** Training for positions in Shop Management, such as that of Superintendent, General Foreman, Foreman, Sub-Foreman, etc.
- ☐ **Industrial Management:** Training for positions in Works Management, Production Control, Industrial Engineering, etc.
- ☐ **Modern Business Correspondence:** Training for Sales or Collection Correspondent, Sales Promotion Manager, Mail Sales Manager, Secretary, etc.
- ☐ **Stenography:** Training in the new superior machine shorthand, Stenotypy.

☐ **Expert Bookkeeping**	☐ **Railway Accounting**
☐ **Business English**	☐ **Effective Speaking**
☐ **Credit and Collection Correspondence**	☐ **C. P. A. Coaching**
	☐ **Commercial Law**

Name.....

Present Position.....

Address.....

Cash When Sick

Over 120,000 People Have Already Provided a Cash Income Up to $100 a Month

Sick benefits up to $100 a month when you are laid up from ANY kind of sickness will be paid under a New health policy now issued by the National Protective Insurance Co.

Men from ages 18 to 69 and women from ages 18 to 59—whether employed or not—and who are now in good health are eligible. No application to fill out. No medical examination required.

Sickness strikes suddenly and unexpectedly. It always causes greatly increased expenses and usually a reduced income. Over 120,000 people have already bought National Protective health policies. Over one and one-half million dollars have been promptly paid in benefits to policyholders.

SEND NO MONEY. Just write your name, address, age and sex to National Protective Insurance Co., 3001 Pickwick Building, Kansas City, Mo., and they will mail you a policy for 10 days' Free Inspection. See the policy first and if you are satisfied, then send us $3.65 to pay the premium for nearly five months. This offer is limited, so write today.

Sends Treatment for

ASTHMA

Paroxysms on Free Trial!

I will send any sufferer a regular $1.25 bottle of Lane's Treatment by prepaid mail. Used by thousands and this bottle does not cost you a single penny until you are relieved—then only $1.25. If not your report cancels charge.
D. J. LANE. 289 Lane Building, St. Marys, Kansas

Start A POTATO CHIP Business In Your Kitchen!

MAKE MONEY! Buy potatoes at 2c lb. — make Sensational new "Greaseless" Potato Chips, and sell for 35c a lb. Big money spare or full time. No experience needed. I tell you how to get stores to sell for you—how to make profit first day. Small investment buys complete equipment. Write for FREE FACTS today!
G. H. HARDT, 629 N. Michigan Avenue, Dept. F-293, Chicago

SONG POEMS WANTED

TO BE SET TO MUSIC
Free Examination. Send Your Poems to
J. CHAS. McNEIL, MASTER OF MUSIC
516-TF So. Alexandria Los Angeles, Calif.

WE MATCH PANTS ToAnySuit!

Double the life of your coat and vest with correctly matched pants. 100,000 patterns. Every pair hand tailored to your measure. Our match sent FREE for your O. K. before pants are made. Fit guaranteed. Send piece of cloth or vest today.
SUPERIOR MATCH PANTS COMPANY
209 S. State St. Dept. 962 Chicago

OLD LEG TROUBLE

Easy to use Viscose Method heals many old leg sores caused by leg congestion, varicose veins, swollen legs and injuries or no cost for TRIAL. Describe your trouble and get FREE BOOK.
T. G. VISCOSE METHOD COMPANY
140 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois

FALSE TEETH

LOWEST PRICES

90 DAYS' TRIAL

If you need teeth, but do not care to spend much money, Write about my Method and LOW PRICES. You MUST be 100% SATISFIED or I will refund your money any time within your 90 day trial. I have many Satisfied Customers in United States and Canada. MY METHOD IS FOUNDED ON 30 YEARS' EXPERIENCE.

SEND NO MONEY

WRITE TODAY for FREE BOOKLET and MATERIAL
DR. CLEVELAND DENTAL LABORATORY
Dept. 2-CO, 503-05 Missouri Ave., East St. Louis, Ill.

A NEW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE of MAGIC and MYSTERY!

•

Featuring George Chance, the Magician-Detective, in Action-Packed Full Book-Length Novels Taken from His Private Memoirs!

•

ASK YOUR NEWSDEALER FOR

THE GHOST

NOW ON SALE **10c** AT ALL STANDS

13

COMPLETE STORIES OF THE WEIRD AND SUPERNATURAL

In Every Issue of

STRANGE STORIES

NOW ON SALE **15c** AT ALL STANDS

EXCITING STORIES OF THE WAR ON ESPIONAGE IN AMERICA

in

THRILLING SPY STORIES

•

ON SALE EVERYWHERE

10c

AT ALL STANDS

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

LET THE STARS BE YOUR GUIDE!

Consult Your Daily Horoscope

in

EVERYDAY ASTROLOGY

Every Month 10c At All Stands

Free DRAWING TEST

If you like to draw, test your sense of design, color, proportion, etc., with our simple Art Ability Test. An opportunity to get a frank opinion, *free,* as to whether your talent is worth developing.

Magazines, newspapers, publishers and advertisers spend millions yearly for illustrations. Design and color influence the sale of most things we buy. Artists have become important to industry. Machines can not displace them. If you have talent, train it. Drawing may be your surest road to success.

The Federal Schools, affiliated with a large art, engraving and printing institution, has trained many young men and women now serving industry as designers or illustrators, capable of earning from $1,000 to $5,000 yearly. Its Home Study courses in Commercial Art, Illustrating and Cartooning, contain exclusive illustrated lessons by many famous artists. Practical instruction by experienced men is the reason for its many years' outstanding success. Courses sold on easy payments.

Send today for Art Test and Free Book explaining present opportunities in art. Just fill out and mail coupon below.

FEDERAL SCHOOLS, Inc.

3630 Federal Schools Bldg.
Minneapolis, Minn.

Send me, without obligation, yor Art Test and Free Book.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Age..... Occupation.....

A Complete Novelet

Painted

Sheriff Blue Steele and Deputy Shorty Watts Swap Lead with Drygulching Coyotes when Buried Loot Goads Killers into a Stampede of Lawlessness!

CHAPTER I

Return of the Past

ON A wooden bench in front of the jail, Deputy Shorty Watts stretched his five-feet-two. Fingers locked behind his mop of red hair, hat tilted forward on freckled nose, he lazily watched the stage road that connected Painted Post with the outer world.

There was nothing to obstruct his view except the circular pole corral at the end of the street. For the town was smaller than some of the spreads in the vast border rangeland of Indian County. A sidewalk of rude planks linked the squat adobe jail

Post Booty

By TOM GUNN

Author of "Painted Post Skeleton," "Painted Post Plunder," etc.

Magpie gaped down on a tangle of five fighting men

with the store, saloon and hotel. There was nothing else.

As Shorty watched, a billow of dust climbed and grew, out yonder on the empty desert basin, between bare, purple-shaddowed ranges. He sat up. The stage was coming in.

Magpie Stevens' old highwheeler made the trip to and from Cottonwood, sixty miles north on the railroad twice a week. It was about the only event that stirred Painted Post in these peaceful times.

Out of the dust emerged a gallop-

Deputy Shorty Watts

ing six-horse team and the lurching stagecoach. But there was something unfamiliar about the figure perched on the high driver's seat. Shorty's pale-lashed eyes squinted. Suddenly he twisted and yipped in the open doorway.

"Sheriff! Something's happened to Magpie!"

The legs of a desk chair grated. Boot-heels awoke the silence within. Blue Steele's tall, lean figure loomed.

"How so, *segundo?*" he asked.

The sheriff of Painted Post was changeless as the view his granite-gray eyes commanded. Bronzed and hard, a touch of mocking humor on his thin lips, his lazy grace masked enormous vitality. The twin Colts slapping his narrow hips were grim symbols of a border country that was not always peaceful.

The twisty smile twitched his mouth as he fingered a pocket of his worn calfskin vest for makings.

"Nothing's gone wrong with Magpie," he drawled indulgently, "except that he's got himself a new hat."

Shorty ran the back of a hand across his eyes.

"It ain't possible!" He blinked incredulously, then nodded agreement. "You're correct as usual, Sheriff. Shucks, it's the first time I ever remember that ol' coot changin' so much as his shirt! Reckon he's lost his mind or won a jackpot?"

"Both, maybe."

GALLOPING hoofs rapidly devoured the distance. The stage tore past the corral gate and swept into the town, tug-chains jangling, brake-blocks grinding.

Magpie hauled to a stop in front of Thimble Jack's Saloon. Steele and Shorty met him as he scrambled down from his lofty perch. He wore a fresh haircut. His stubbly jaw was shaved clean.

The new Stetson was clamped down at a challenging tilt.

"Well, what you gazabos starin' at?" he demanded.

Shorty spoke out of the side of his mouth.

"He's mildewin' under all that shade, Sheriff."

"Might gather moss. When he grows back some whiskers for it to hang onto."

Magpie stiffened. "Out of the ten-spot I got left," he stated with dignity, "I aimed to buy you fellers a drink. Any more impolite comments, and I change my mind."

"Where'd you git yore ten dollars?" asked Shorty.

"Same place I got the other ten-spot. The one I invested in this headgear."

It wasn't much of an explanation. But it had to do while Magpie hauled down the mailbag. When he had slapped the nearly empty mailbag down on Thimble Jack's bar, though, he agitated the subject voluntarily.

"Feller'd think it was a miracle," he grumbled, "me gittin' hold o' twenty dollars, all at one time."

Waspish, goat-bearded Doc Crabtree kept his eyes on his game of pinochle with Judge John Bertram, owner of the T Bar T.

"The miracle is where it came from," he said.

Magpie's answer made them all sit up and take notice.

"Old Man McCall handed it to me. Two shiny ten dollar gold pieces. Yes, sir."

Shorty reeled melodramatically and grabbed the bar.

"What, that hidebound ol' Scotchman? That makes it a miracle, shore enough! He never gave away a dime!"

"I didn't say he *give* it to me," Magpie corrected. "He *paid* it."

Bertram looked up from under frosty, clawhammer eyebrows.

"Paid it?" he rumbled. "For what?"

"For not askin' any prying questions. About the package, mainly."

"What package?" yapped Shorty.

"The one I delivered for him to the Wells Fargo office up at Cottonwood."

"Good Godfrey, a man's got to corkscrew information out o' you!" Judge Bertram boomed. "What was in the package?"

"It was addressed tuh the Bank o' Tucson."

Thimble Jack twisted his turtle neck back towards his shoulders and grunted disgustedly.

"Looks mighty funny! The old skinflint, he was flat busted only a week or so back."

"Who said he was?" Magpie demanded argumentatively.

"He did, his own self. Couldn't pay his bar bill last time in town. Look."

THIMBLE JACK fished a silver watch about the size of a flatiron out of his cash till. He held it up by its heavy chain for all to see.

"Left it for security," the bartender explained.

A silence settled down while the group absorbed the baffling mixture of facts.

Shorty was the first to voice what they were all thinking.

"That must o' been a mighty valuable package McCall sent."

Sheriff Blue Steele

Magpie was enjoying the general mystification.

"He handled it like eggs when he passed it up to me, there at Box L Springs, on my up-trip. And it was McCall's idea, me gittin' a new hat. He says, 'Git a big one that you can keep this here secret under.' So there went one tenspot you fellers won't drink up on me."

Steele until now had contributed nothing to the conversation. But he had listened intently.

"The other tenner, where is it?" he now said.

"Still don't believe me, huh?" crowed Magpie. He spun a bright coin onto the bar. Steele's keen gaze was on it as it stopped spinning. Thimble Jack raked it in.

"Name yore medicine, gents," he requested.

They ordered rye, all but Steele.

"I'll take the watch," was his unexpected response.

"And leave me without no security?" complained Thimble Jack. "No, sir. I can't!"

Shorty climbed onto the foot-rail and jabbed a stern finger toward the bartender's nose.

"Yuh heerd what the sheriff ordered," he gritted. "Hand that turnip over, *amigo*."

Thimble Jack recoiled, clutching the watch against him. One thumb crept around to the stem.

"Guess what time it says and maybe I will," he countered.

"Wrong time," Shorty shot back promptly. "It's the wrong time to git playful, too, you fiddle-faced wallapus. Now—"

The bartender's thumb pressed the stem. The hunting case flew open. Something popped out, onto the bar. It was a tightly folded square of yellowed paper.

Shorty grabbed, but Steele's long reach beat him to it. The sheriff turned deliberately and left the saloon. Shorty and Thimble Jack both gaped after him.

"You reckon he knowed something was inside?" puzzled the bartender. "That why he said hand him the watch?"

The cradling arms of twilight were rocking the desert to sleep as Steele strode into the jail office and lit the wall lamp. At his desk, he carefully unfolded the bit of newsprint that had fallen out of McCall's watch.

So old and brittle was the brief clipping that only the delicate sensitive touch of Steele's fingers prevented it from crumbling.

At the top was the dateline and name of a pioneer Tucson weekly. It had been published twenty years before. Twenty years, Steele noted with slightly widened eyes, to the day!

He leaned close and read carefully:

PAYROLL HOLDUP
AT FORT BOWIE

Three masked men held up and robbed a pay train of $7,000 near Fort Bowie last week. A dispatch reaching Tucson said that a troop of cavalrymen gave chase, tracked the culprits as far south as Box L Springs, and there killed one of them.

Two others escaped in a running fight toward Mexico. The troops returned to Box L Springs, the dispatch says, and began a search on the theory that the booty had been hidden near there when the robber band was close-pressed. Though they combed the rough country thereabouts, no trace of a cache was found. The loot consisted of gold coin, in denominations of fives, tens and twenties.

STEELE'S eyes lifted from the faded print as footsteps sounded on the sidewalk. Someone was coming up from the saloon. He hastily slid the clipping into a drawer and closed it.

Doc Crabtree entered. He fastened a penetrating gaze on the sheriff across the top of his spectacles.

"This country, it's full of legends about hidden gold," he stated abruptly.

"Just yarns, nine-tenths o' them," was Steele's retort.

"Hm-m-m. Mebbe. Well, whatever was in McCall's watch, I can seen plain enough you ain't sayin'."

But he waited, half-hopefully.

"You got something else on your mind, Doc," the sheriff said. "Spill it."

Crabtree lopped a leg across a corner of the desk, removed his spectacles. Yanking out some slack shirt tail, he thoughtfully polished the lenses.

"What I got to say," he admitted unwillingly, "ain't what I'd go spreadin' about any so-called respectable citizen. But a mighty funny thing happened the last time McCall come to town. The day he left that watch at the saloon."

"So you saw him, too, Doc?" drawled Steele.

"You know?" gasped Crabtree, nearly dropping the spectacles.

"I saw him take that shovel you kept under the sidewalk between the hotel an' store. Sure. I saw him ride off with it."

"As coroner," blurted Crabtree, a little nettled at being cheated of his story, "I may be needin' that shovel agin!"

The thin smile flicked Sheriff Steele's lips.

"An indispensable instrument of the

medical profession, a shovel is," he said.

"That's a mighty porely timed joke!" rasped Crabtree, getting up. He returned to Thimble Jack's in a huff.

CHAPTER II

Steele Interprets Law

MCCALL rode into Painted Post the next afternoon. Steele saw him pass the jail. Despite Shorty's jabbered insistence, he made no effort to halt the Box L rancher.

"He won't leave town, *segundo,*" he stated confidently. "Not without honorin' us with a visit."

The prediction proved correct. Up from the saloon came McCall in stiff-legged indignation. He barged in, a raw-boned, angular man with high cheekbones guarding deep-set eyes. Long years in Arizona Territory and a ragged roan mustache had done little to soften the rasping burr of his Highland dialect.

"Guid day ta ye, lads," he greeted with visible restraint. "Might a mon ask for the return o' his lawful propitty?"

"Trustin' soul, ain't he?" remarked Shorty. "Well, Mac, it don't look like sudden riches have changed yuh much."

McCall's expression chilled. He and Shorty never had hit it off any too well.

"I'm observin'," he gritted, "that auld gossip's tongue wagged as I mought o' ken!"

"Meanin' Magpie?"

Steele spoke up now.

"Listen, McCall. The law says that robbery switches possession but not ownership."

"Aye?" breathed the other coldly.

"Which makes that Fort Bowie booty the property o' the United States guv'ment."

A cunning light crept into the other's eyes. He leaned gnarled knuckles on the desk.

"Mought be, ye ken that after twenty years, such losses belong ta the finder?"

"By gravy, he won that round, Sheriff!" gusted Shorty.

Steele was undisturbed. "The day you turned that package over to Magpie, it was a day short of twenty years," he pointed out.

This duel of legal intricacies were coming too fast for Shorty. McCall had an answer, though.

"Aye, twenty years just, by the date on the bit o' paper ye snooped fra me! But tha holdup, Shuriff, it was a week forninst the date o' the news, mind ye!" He straightened, plainly pleased with himself, resting his bony knuckles on his hips. "Twenty years and mair, it's been!"

"Nonetheless, McCall, if you dug up that booty, it was dug up plumb illegal," Steele said.

"Whoosh, mon! 'Twas on my own land!"

"But I'm arresting you, just the same."

"Are ye daft, mon?" cried McCall.

"You're under arrest for stealin' a shovel. Doc Crabtree's shovel."

McCall was a pious man and he never swore. But he had to fight to hold back now, his lips pressed flat against his set teeth. With one angry, contemptuous sound, he turned. Shorty leaped and had him by the scruff of the neck.

McCall whirled violently, to the loud rip of his shirt collar, and a knobby fist whizzed at the little deputy's jaw.

SHORTY took the blow on a jerked-up shoulder. He swung a left himself, just as McCall stepped in. He missed, but locked an arm around McCall's skinny neck.

In the next instant they both went

down. They pounded, kicked, jabbed and clawed at each other. This was the outcome of long months of bad feeling. For the sake of future peace, it might have been wise to have let it go to a finish.

But Steele's interest in the encounter, unlike Shorty's, was not a personal one. He was playing the game of law, according to his own interpretation of it. He stepped around the desk, got McCall by the seat of the pants and hustled him, struggling and caterwauling, to the single cell in back of the jail office.

He popped his prisoner inside and the barred door clanged shut. McCall gripped the bars, raging like a captive gorilla.

"It's spite, naught else!" he howled.

His ire collapsed at Steele's cool admission.

"Spite? Sure, partly. But with what's going on, you old rooster, jail's the best place for you. Take it easy."

Shorty was dusting himself off and grumbling at the interrupted larruping he had expected to give McCall.

"C'mon, *segundo*. Get the hosses under leather," Steele ordered.

"Ye leavin' me here ta starve?" wailed the prisoner.

"Doc Crabtree, he'll see that don't happen," was Steele's assurance. "The doc, he's mighty interested in buried treasure, too, McCall. He'll be over in a hurry, with a bagful o' questions."

"Nae bit o' good will it do him!" McCall snapped.

Shorty trotted after Steele's long stride, up toward the feed corral.

"Where for, Sheriff?" he demanded breathlessly.

"Box L Springs."

Shorty caught up and fell into step.

"Say, Sheriff," he panted, "ain't it sort o' stretchin' the law to lock up a man like McCall on a measly charge o' rustlin' a danged shovel?"

"Yes," was Steele's elusive answer, "and also no."

They reached the corral gate.

"I ain't got all this very straight yet, Sheriff. But yuh let on as how that Fort Bowie gold was stole twenty years back."

"That's correct."

"But look here! I seen that ten dollar gold piece that Magpie slung on the bar! It wasn't old money! It was shiny and brand-new!"

"Here's the straight of it, *segundo*. McCall, he dug around plenty, lookin' for that Fort Bowie gold. He stole doc's shovel, so's his own outfit wouldn't get suspicious by him takin' one from the ranch. But he didn't find that Fort Bowie gold. He never dug up a dollar of it!"

"Then what," squawked Shorty, "was in that package he gave Magpie? And why did he act so mysterious, payin' Magpie twenty bucks just to—"

"McCall, he's smart enough to know the quickest way to get facts spread around is to just let Magpie get a inkle about 'em."

"But that don't explain what the hammerheaded ol' Scotchman sent to the Tucson Bank!"

"It explains why we're hittin' out for the Box L, now."

At the feed rack, a remarkably-colored horse turned and nickered softly at sound of the sheriff's voice. The famous steel-dust gelding glinted like newly lathed metal in the late afternoon sun.

Man and horse had outraced, outfought every challenger who had ever hit the Border country.

PURPLE shadows chased the fading day over the edges of the world as Steele and Shorty rode towards the Caliente River. An early, round moon danced with white feet on the rippling shallows as their horses splashed across the ford.

The hushed splendor of the night filled the little deputy with a strange ecstasy. They rode up the steep, zig-

zag ascent of rimrock benches that lifted to a juniper plateau.

Here, on the McCall range, the higher desert became a fantastic wilderness. The shadowy forms of juniper clumps seemed vague threats. Shorty's mood changed to one of foreboding. But Steele rode on, granite in muscles and face and eye, unchanged and changeless, wrapped in somber thoughts.

The lonely melancholy of the wilderness increased where the road dipped to a barren flat. Coarse salt grass struggled on that alkali ground, its crust crunching like frost-gripped snow under hoofs. The rank scent of stagnation came from a dense thicket of mesquite. Off to the left of it, on a small rise of ground, rose a small, dark cabin.

This was the Box L line camp. Before McCall took the watering place into his range, it had been a sheep camp. Though that had been many years ago, tumbled lambing pens still lay beyond the cabin. Now, mingled with the stagnation of a waterhole by the mesquite, rose a sharp stench of rotting carrion.

"Why do cow critters always pick a waterhole as a place to die at?" Shorty sniffed complainingly.

"Why didn't McCall's line rider skin this one out and hang the hide on a fence?" was Steele's response.

"Mebbe the ol' tightwad don't hire a line rider no more." They were in front of the stark, unlighted cabin. "It's a cinch, these here premises don't look occupied, none."

Steele alighted and sang out a hello. For a moment there seemed to be an answering stir inside. But no occupant appeared.

Shorty swung off the pinto and started toward the cabin. But Steele stepped past him. He shouldered the door wider, and struck a match. Framed there for an instant, he stood peering inside. Then he dropped the match and turned abruptly. His voice was brittle hard.

"Cows ain't all that die at this waterhole," he said.

Shorty crowded close behind him as he struck a second match and entered. The old cabin was a ten by twelve. Into that small space were jammed a table in the center of the floor, a stove and cupboard in one corner by a broken window, and across the room, a board-sided bunk.

The moon sent a long beam through the window, onto a man stretched out in the bunk. A threadbare blanket dangled from stiff, upturned feet to the littered floor. [*Turn Page*]

THE AWAKENING OF MR. A.
MR. A.: Whew! I hate the very thought of having to take a cathartic.
MR. B.: You wouldn't if you'd only try Ex-Lax. It tastes swell—just like chocolate.
MR. A.: Why, that's what we give to the youngsters. What I need is dynamite!
MR. B.: Don't kid yourself! Ex-Lax is plenty effective, but it won't upset you.
LATER
MR. A.: Boy, I feel like a million this morning! That Ex-Lax sure is great stuff!
MR. B.: You said it, pal! We've been using Ex-Lax in our family for 30 years!
The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle!* No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. It's good for *every* member of the family
10¢ and 25¢
EX-LAX
THE CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

Steele's hand went to the table, found a stub of candle stuck in its grease. He drew it to his dwindling match. Light filled the cabin to the dusty rafters.

"This hombre's been dead awhile," Steele said.

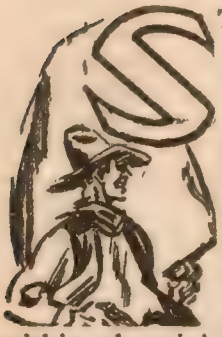
He threw back the blanket. Long-dried blood made a dark patch on the dead man's left side—the side toward the wall. His shirt was punctured by three close-grouped bullet holes.

The rigid hand gripped the edge of the blanket, clamped there in death. As Steele pulled the blanket away, the fingers partly opened. Something dropped to the floor.

Steele picked up a gold piece, the mate to the one Magpie had flung on Thimble Jack's bar the night before!

CHAPTER III

Ambush for Breakfast



STEELE blew out the candle and joined Shorty outside.

"Listen, Sheriff," demanded the little deputy, "didn't Magpie say it was here McCall handed him that express package?"

"Magpie passes within whoopin' distance o' here four times a week," was the terse answer.

"He'd o' knowed the line rider. He'd o' noticed if the feller wasn't around."

Steele already had reached one firm deduction.

"That johnny-come-lately in there, he ain't no McCall line rider," he stated.

"How yuh figger that out?"

"The dead cow, it as good as told us that. You guessed it when you said there's no Box L puncher stationed here any more."

"Took a varmint to walk in and murder that feller in cold blood," Shorty gritted irrelevantly.

"The killer didn't enter."

"Then how—"

Steele went around to the back of the cabin. He easily discovered what he searched for. White alkali mud had been daubed on the weathered boards, exactly at a level with the head of the bunk. He picked it off. There they were—three splintery bullet holes, proving that the killing had been craftily premeditated.

"Sheriff," Shorty declared grimly, "I reckon you didn't make no mistake, after all, when yuh locked up Old Man McCall. That feller, he was plenty dead two-three days ago, when McCall was here. And it ain't reasonable tuh think McCall didn't know it. That he didn't even look inside the cabin."

There was more to it than that, Steele knew.

Whoever killed the stranger had known the cabin layout from the inside, beforehand.

But McCall was not the killing kind. Harsh and stubborn though he was, with a knack of getting into frequent squabbles, the Box L rancher had a certain inflexible code of conduct.

"A campfire, over yonder past the mesquite, it'd be sort o' cheerful right now," Shorty hinted, reaching for a stirrup.

"We dark-camp, *segundo*," Steele retorted. "I got a strong notion that our camp killer, he's still around, unless—"

"Unless what?" Shorty asked.

"Unless he found what he came after."

Shorty raised his shoulders in an involuntary shudder. It may have been the penetrating damp chill of the barren flats.

"This thing's gettin' too complicated," he fretted. "And besides, there's a spooky feelin' about it. On account of it stretchin' back twenty years."

He got into saddle.

"Mebbe that feller inside is one o'

the three holdups that robbed the Fort Bowie pay train, Sheriff."

Steele did not answer as he swung onto the gelding. The two of them rode to bedding ground beyond the mesquite.

Steele was up at the first gray gleam of dawn. He strode across the wilderness to the cabin and reentered.

Daylight, increasing fast, flooded the gloomy death chamber from the broken window and wide-open doorway.

He ransacked the cabin for some thing that might give him his answer.

Except for a meager stock of food in the cupboard above the stove, there was nothing to be found. The gun victim Steele called a "johnny-come-lately" had traveled light.

THE sheriff looked at the corpse. It was dressed in shirt, pants, socks. On the floor beside the bunk, a pair of worn boots stood neatly together. A hat hung on a nail in the wall.

Steele took down the hat, to inspect the label in the sweatband. This revealed more than he had expected.

Long ago, the walls of the cabin had been lined with newspapers for insulation against bad weather. The paper was yellow, the print a blurry gray, streaked where matches had been struck.

Under the hat, a small section had been cut away, very neatly. Silently, the sheriff pulled out of his vest the clipping that had fallen from McCall's watch.

It fitted perfectly!

The hat yielded no information, except the maker's name. It was old, sweat-darkened and battered. He was replacing it on the nail when it smote him with sudden familiarity. He had seen that hat before, often.

That was Magpie Stevens' old hat, the one he had worn for so long! Steele even remembered the bullet nick in the brim, souvenir of a gun chase months before. There was no possibility of mistake.

He hung the hat up and gave his attention to the corpse.

The man was too old for a cowpuncher. Past fifty, Steele guessed. The neck fell away in folds from a bony, jutting jaw covered with stubbly gray whiskers. Between the glassy, staring eyes jutted a thin, high-bridged nose.

The head lay on a piece of floursacking, which Steele carefully drew out. A portion of the cloth had been cut away. Under the floursacking, serving as a pillow, was a shabby, neatly folded coat. Steele went through the pockets. They were empty, except for a worn envelope in the breast pocket. A threaded needle was stuck inside the lining. The man had been sewing something. But what? His clothing showed no evidence of repair, though it needed it badly.

Steele shook the envelope. A sheet of paper slipped out, an army discharge certificate, dated recently.

Arnold B. Gates.
Troop B. 40th Cavalry, U. S. Army

THAT old discharge certificate told the story. This man, Steele was convinced, was one of the command who had given chase to the Fort Bowie holdups, twenty years before.

He had returned to this spot, evidently, to hunt for the lost pay gold.

The way the boots stood, in orderly position on the floor beside the bunk, clinched Steele's conviction. Unconsciously, the dead man had clung to old barracks custom in going to bed for what proved to be his last sleep.

Steele could find no indication of how he had come, or how long he had occupied the line cabin. There was only his one possession, the Government discharge slip.

Blowing open the long envelope, Steele was thrusting the document back into it. A gunshot smashed the outside stillness to bits.

He leaped to the doorway, the twin

Colts in his hands. By the mesquite, where the seep of the Box L Spring rose, quivered Shorty with their two horses. The little deputy had been in the act of watering them when the shot boomed out. The loose coils of their picket ropes still lay where Shorty had dropped them.

Shorty had dropped, too. He was snaked out on the wet ground, beside the boxed-in waterhole. Six-gun drawn, he peered across the top of the spring enclosure towards the mesquite.

Bluish smoke drifted from a point where the growth hugged the ground thickly. Steele's keen eye followed it. He saw a slow, cautious movement—the hunched shoulders of a man crawling on hands and knees.

It offered a tiny target at such distance. But Steele steadied his Colt against the door frame, sighted as carefully as the early light would allow, and squeezed.

Again the dawn silence was shattered, but more than by gun sound this time. The Colt report brought a convulsive leap, and then a high-pitched scream. He could hear Shorty's attacker threshing in the thorny undergrowth, could see the swaying branches above.

"Good leather, Sheriff!" Shorty yipped. "Look out, there's another one!"

A .45's roar cut his cheer short. Lead whacked the boarded-in spring, less than a foot from the little deputy's face. He ducked, hat flying from his head at the impact of splinters. The two horses reared high from their interrupted drinking.

Steele's granite eyes probed the mesquite. The .45 roared again. A slug thudded into the door beside him, at level with his shoulders. He slid back inside. Shorty sprang up for the horses.

"He's vamoosin', Sheriff, yonder beyond the thicket! He's streakin' out for the hills!"

Steele covered the distance between the cabin and the spring in a breathless spurt. He could see the fugitive now, a quarter-mile away, making for an opening in the rugged hillside, between two looming boulders.

Shorty was plucking dazedly at a bullet-ripped sleeve.

"If I'd been wearin' a half-size smaller, it would of nicked me!" he blurted.

"Get them broncs under leather, sudden!" Steele crackled.

Shorty gathered a double handful of picket rope, sprang onto the pinto's bare back, scampered for camp, a hundred yards away.

Steele made for the mesquite. He had to duck and crawl to reach that spot where the threshing sound had died to a weak stir.

THE dawn marauder was as dead as though his spine had been cracked by a hangman's noose. Steele's shot had clipped him through the backbone, just where stooped shoulders became a long, gawky neck.

He was young, beardless, and his ungainly length had cost him his life. He was roughly dressed in old, patched denim and sateen. But his half-boots were of fancily-stitched calf, adorned with silver conchas. A small, silver ring with turquoise setting glittered on one lean, jerking hand.

Steele took the gun that lay close to the hand. He felt the powder warmth of the barrel as he thrust it inside his waistband.

A quick search of the pockets revealed a badly nicked claspknife of stockmen's pattern, a handful of cartridges, a few dollars in mixed change that included some Mexican *dinero*. The last thing Steele found was a dainty bracelet with turquoise setting that matched the ring!

Ultimately, that jewelry might identify this ambusher. When Steele returned to camp, Shorty was tugging the gelding's latigo tight.

There was no question about the

course of action they should follow. They hit saddle in unison, and streaked out after the escaped fugitive.

The rider had vanished between the boulders that formed massive portals to a small canyon mouth. Steele was well in the lead when they plunged into it. Shorty ducked, hat brim shielding his face from flying, stinging sand from the gelding's hoofs. Up the narrow wash they raced, the gouged tracks of their quarry plain in the fine sand.

They hastened over a low, dry falls. The canyon was a narrow slash in the hills, rising to a sharp summit. The gray gelding agile as a deer, scrambled to the crest. Down the yonder slope, slanting across a slide of shale, and into the dense tangle of a north slope the getaway trail was clearly marked.

Steele knew the danger of that moment. He was ready, with a Colt out, for a split-second exchange. But his shot from the line cabin doorway had evidently impressed the fugitive.

As he paused for an instant on the crest, he heard rock tumbling, near the foot of the brushy slope. A small covey of quail flushed, whirring, from a clump of juniper.

His eye held to that area. He was rewarded by a flashing glimpse of his man tearing through a small opening in the cover.

Steele fired. It was guess-shooting at unlikely range.

He did not see his bullet hit anywhere, nor could he sight his man again. It was close to real dawn now. Further pursuit meant facing the sun's glare. The fugitive was gunwise enough to keep going straight toward the light.

So Steele ambled along the ridge as the pinto struggled to the top. He motioned Shorty to take the opposite direction.

For a fruitless hour they held vigil along that high rim, scrutinizing the maze of dips and cross canyons that extended to the black lava caps of the Caliente Hills.

Then Steele rode back to the point where he had abandoned the chase. The little deputy joined him, boiling over with unanswerable questions.

"Who yuh reckon them jiggers was, Sheriff?"

"More johnny-come-latelies."

"But why'd they crack down on me?"

"McCall, he ain't the only one itchy for that Fort Bowie gold."

Shorty sighed. "Well, I'd swap my chances for a good breakfast."

The chase accomplished one purpose. So long as the surviving bushwhacker lingered in this region, he would have to return to the Box L for water, which he had failed to get that morning. Short of Squaw Creek, miles away in the Caliente Hills, there was no other water.

CHAPTER IV

Gambling Pays Dividends

AS CORONER of Indian County, it was Doc Crabtree's job to account for the circumstances of the death of those two men at the Box L and to bury them. Either Steele or Shorty was supposed to return to Painted Post and notify him. At the same time it would allow one of them to quiz McCall about the suspicious death of the ex-cavalryman in the line cabin.

But new complexities confronted the lawmen on their return to the waterhole.

"Look, Sheriff!" jabbered Shorty as they emerged onto the flats, past the looming boulders. "Three hosses, there in front o' the cabin!"

Steele had already seen. But he did not falter or make any effort at con-

cealment. Openly, he headed for the place at an easy lope. When he and Shorty were within rifle shot of the cabin, a man appeared in the doorway. He darted back. An instant later, two others popped into view, making for their horses.

Steele shouted a command before they could mount. His badge backed up that command. The trio waited uneasily until the lawmen closed in.

They were a hard-faced crew, sullen-eyed and surly. All wore six-guns. Their mounts were gaunt and sweat-streaked from long, hard riding.

"What you hombres here for?" Steele demanded.

The older one gave his hat brim a tug and stuck out a belligerent jaw.

"Does a man got to account for bein' present in these parts?" he countered.

"Under some circumstances, yes, plenty."

The other jerked a thumb towards the cabin.

"We ain't got no connection with the carcass in there, if that's what yuh're drivin' at."

"Who are you and where are you headed, and why?" Steele pursued. "That's what I'm driving at, *amigo.*"

The spokesman shifted his feet and shot a side-glance at his companions, who, Steele thought, looked like brothers.

"Do we give his nibs our life history or not?"

"Just ridin' through from Cottonwood," one of the younger men mumbled. "Heard ranches down thisaway might be hirin'."

"Where at did you work last?"

"Ain't worked lately."

"Reckoned you hadn't," Steele replied coldly. "And not anxious to start, or you wouldn't be night-riding. Fact is, none o' you ever warmed an honest iron, ain't that correct?"

The older man made a menacing move. His reach froze as a Colt appeared with magic suddenness across Steele's pommel.

"This," snapped the sheriff, "is a right unhealthy climate for looters. Besides which, the Fort Bowie gold, it's been found."

This shot in the dark instantly told on their faces. The oldest man was first to recover from his dismay.

"We ain't got no idea what yuh mean by—"

"Don't bother lying."

"All right!" The other's voice rose hotly. "That's no man's money, and there ain't no law says otherwise! You got no right to order us to vamoose, or to explain ourselves."

"Here comes the stage," announced Shorty.

The man craned around. Magpie was sending his team down across the flats, swerving toward the group in front of the cabin. Steele kept the three men covered.

"Collect their hardware, *segundo,*" he ordered.

THE older man swore, and the two brothers mumbled protests. But the little deputy knee-reined the pinto among them, leaned down and lifted the six-guns out of their holsters. As he finished, Magpie hauled up.

"Hi, Sheriff!" he hailed. "What—Who—"

"Three passengers for you," interrupted Steele. He waggled the Colt. "Climb into the ol' peppershaker, you hombres. I'm tyin' your broncs on behind. The driver, he'll return your guns when you hit Cottonwood. Herd 'em aboard, *segundo,* and lock 'em in!"

The older man balked.

"Damn yuh, yuh can't make us!"

"And if any o' you appear in this bailiwick again," Steele cut in sharply, "your luck'll be over."

It was plain rawhiding. No offense had been committed, as yet. But it came now. Shorty was tossing the six-guns up to Magpie.

"Shucks, I don't crave this cage full o' wildcats!" Magpie sputtered. "This

conveyance ain't no perambulatin' jailhouse!"

The older man leaped at one of the six-guns in mid-air. Shorty at the moment shielded him from Steele's Colt.

He caught the tossed gun expertly, flipped it to get a grip. Shorty catapulted off the saddle, grabbed his arm. Steele sent the gelding in rearing, aiming a downward barrel-slap. The two brothers went at him like winter wolves.

In the next second, Magpie gaped down on a fierce tangle of five fighting men. His hands were so full of guns he couldn't handle any one of them.

Steele slipped from saddle, one brother hanging on his gun-arm, the other snatching for the Colt on his left thigh. The sheriff's free elbow came back with a vicious sweep. It jabbed the attacker's eye with terrible force.

With a stricken howl, this brother gave up his try for the Colt. He clapped both hands to his damaged orb and reeled away.

Steele's left arm finished the blow he had started as he was being dragged down. It smacked against the tensed neck cord on the side of the neck. The other brother collapsed, downed by what Steel had to admit was a rabbit blow. .

Steele tore free, came to his feet, still gripping the Colt in his right hand. Immediately, the older man's steeple-crowned hat telescoped under the impact of a wallop that knocked him limp.

"Look out!" Magpie screeched.

The two lawmen spun around. The temporarily blinded brother had dropped to his knees. His fumbling hand encountered the fallen six-gun. Swiftly, he sprang to a crouch and fired. It could not have missed at that pointblank range had it not been for the blinded eye. It grazed Steele's body, brought a sick croak out of the stage.

Steele leaped, bowled the armed one over with his full weight, and the gun went spinning. He swiftly scooped it up, rushed to the open door of the stagecoach.

The blinded battler had sent a bullet through his own brother's heart. The older man, who might have been a witness to account for the accidental tragedy, was still blissfully unconscious. Magpie was yanking at taut reins. And the three horses of these johnnie-come-latelies were bolting in as many different directions.

Shorty made a jump for the pinto.

"Sheriff, what a mess we got on our hands now!"

"You saw how it happened?" Steele asked Magpie.

The driver, busy with the fractious stage team, shouted back over his shoulder.

"All I kin swear to is"—he doubled over in a spasm of strangling that

[*Turn page*]

I MAKE SURE YOU GET A BIG, BIG BOTTLE
PEPSI-COLA
REFRESHING HEALTHFUL
A PARALYZING BRACING BEVERAGE
PEPSI-COLA
FAMOUS FOR OVER 30 YEARS
5¢
12 OZ. BOTTLE
I MAKE SURE YOU GET A PURE AND TASTY DRINK

nearly toppled him from his seat before he was able to finish wheezingly —"that I swallered my chaw, and didn't see a blamed thing!"

ON THE evening following Steele and Shorty's departure from town, Judge Bertram went home to the T Bar T. Doc Crabtree had to fall back on solitaire. The one-handed game was a weak substitute for pinochle, but it was a lot better than nothing.

Only McCall was whooping for attention, so the doctor angrily slapped down his cards.

He found the irate rancher madly pacing his small cell.

"How long must mon endure this monkey cage?" McCall yowled. "Ha' ye the keys?"

"Nope. Wouldn't help none if I did have." But he added half-hopefully, "Mebbe I might be able to help yuh pass the time faster, pervidin' yuh got a few drops o' sportin' blood in your system."

"Aye, wi' gamin' cards! The devil's aun device!" snapped McCall.

"Huh, that's funny talk! From a tootin', lootin' freebooter!"

McCall came close to the bars, eyes smoldering.

"Hear me, mon!" he said dangerously. "I ha' ne'er claimed ta ha' found the Fort Bowie gold!"

Doc Crabtree gave the other a severe look across the top of his spectacles.

"Wha's mair ta the point," vowed McCall, "I dinna know where the booty is hid!" And then he added ruefully: "Though I admit, in confidence, mind ye, that I've done a bit o' pokin' aboot for it!"

"Huh! Then yuh *did* rustle my shovel!"

"Borra's the wurd, ye slanderin' corpse-maker."

Doc Crabtree flipped a hand as though the point was a trifling technicality, even though it had landed McCall in jail. He moved negligently toward the jail office doorway. But McCall halted him with a hasty apology.

"Aweel, na need ta huff about it now, eh? And wha' was thot mention o' sportin' blood?"

Doc Crabtree paused.

"I sort o' figgered, since there ain't nobody else around that's intelligent enough, mebbe me and you might indulge in a quiet little session. Playin' through the bars wouldn't hinder pinochle."

McCall rubbed his chin thoughtfully for a moment, then shrugged off his scruples.

"Aweel, ta pass the time, as ye state so clearly. For a penny a point, say?"

Doc Crabtree brightened. He had no doubt that he was the best pinochle player in southern Arizona. Also, he believed McCall carried an attractive number of those bright, mysterious ten dollar gold pieces.

The game ended with Doc Crabtree, to his intense chagrin, nine dollars and thirty cents in the hole.

"You old hypocrite!" he growled. "Claimin' yuh was plumb ignorant o' the game!"

McCall rubbed his hands together.

"I'll make ye a proposition, Doc," he suggested generously. "We'll call it square. Wi' me the rightful owner o' thot shovel, eh?"

"Yuh mean you'll call off the bets? Just for that danged ol' shovel?" Crabtree asked in amazement.

"Aye. It's wurrth thot ta me. And noo, since a charge na longer exists, on account of a mon na bein' able ta steal his aun shovel, I'm askin' ye again—ha' ye thot jail key?"

"And if I say I haven't?"

"Then I'll be takin' the nine dollars and thurrty cents."

Doc Crabtree heaved a profound sigh and fished the cell key out of his pocket.

MCCALL would have reached Box L Springs well ahead of Magpie had he gone directly. But,

topping the rimrock ascent, he left the stage road. He bore westerly toward his home spread, which lay about ten miles from the line cabin at the waterhole.

He hit home about daylight. He breakfasted in the cook-shack. Without bothering to rest, he saddled a fresh horse and rode alone toward where he had spent so many days hunting for the Fort Bowie gold.

"Noo thot the rumor's spread thot I've found the gold," he exulted, "there'll be na mair searchin' parties trespassin' aboot."

But he congratulated himself too soon. For when he came to the spot where he had stashed the shovel, in a long canyon that rose from the flats by the waterhole, he glimpsed the fading smokedrift of a small campfire.

Apprehensively, he halted and scanned the vicinity. Moving forward cautiously, he found that the camp had been very recently abandoned. Under a palo verde tree were three soogan rolls and some crude camp gear.

On the slope just above the camp-spot he had done considerable exploratory digging. There he beheld, to his dismay, signs of intensive activity—freshly-turned earth, foot-tracks, horse signs.

He made a quick look around. By the lack of canteens or any other water containers, he knew the trio camping here were absent only temporarily. When he found hoofprints in the canyon, he realized that they had gone after water.

He struck out for the Box L. As he approached it, he heard a shot. Rowelling his horse, he burst out onto the alkali flats, sighted the stage halted in front of the line cabin.

There was trouble sign there, excited activity. Three riderless horses were bolting from the scene. One of them charged directly at McCall. He recognized Shorty by the gaudy little pinto streaking in pursuit.

McCall realized that he had caught up with the trio who had camped at the palo verde tree and prodded into his own treasure diggings. At the line cabin, the runaway horse was still heading toward him. They had run afoul of the law.

CHAPTER V

Pay-dirt Palaver

QUICKLY, McCall shook out his rope, swung a widening loop. He made a shrewd throw over the animal's head. The rope jerked tight, forcing the horse to set its legs in a quick stop. An empty canteen flopped at the saddle-horn.

Shorty reared up beside him as he gathered in his throw.

"How in all creation did *you* git here?" yawped the little deputy. And then, before McCall could answer: "Well, it's good yuh showed up. Saves me and the sheriff a ride in."

"Whoosh! Wha' ye blabberin' aboot the noo?"

"Just a triflin' matter of a murder. Mebbe you can explain for it. C'mon, yuh ol' wallapus."

McCall was too flabbergasted to protest. He was overwhelmed with the unhappy realization that he had hopped from the frying pan into the fire.

Standing beside the stage, Steele grimly ordered McCall to dismount and enter the line cabin.

Two convincing explanations were needed to put McCall beyond the pale of suspicion. Steele summed the points up in the fewest possible words as soon as the rancher recovered from the shock of what he saw on the crude bunk.

"First," Steele demanded, "how come you didn't know a dead man occupied these here premises the day

you handed Magpie the express package? Next, tell us how you got gold pieces that match this."

He displayed the coin he had found in the dead man's clutch.

Magpie had quieted his team and now leaned in the doorway. The answer to the first question came from him.

"Hold on, Sheriff. McCall, he told me that day that he'd grubstaked an old geezer stoppin' over here at the Box L. And he was fightin' shy o' him, on account o' he didn't crave tuh be stuck for another loan o' money. That's why he didn't come near the cabin, here."

McCall gave the stage driver a grateful look.

"Thot's a fact. I gave the mon tha money, him pleadin' the need for clothes and tobacco."

"You grubstaked him to save hiring a line rider?"

"'Twas my notion, aye. He could na less than keep the waterhole cleaned oot. The mon said he was in want of a rest-up. The furrst and last time I seen the mon was a fortnight back, when I lent him tha money. All I asked in return was him ta inform me if others lurked hereaboot."

Knowing McCall's habit of close-dealing, that sounded plausible.

"I gie ye my solemn wurrd, Shuriff," the Box L owner added, "the last time I stood inside this cabin was on a day last winter, when I clipped fra the wall that auld news bit. Which enthoosed me ta look aboot for tha Fort Bowie booty. I must o' been observed, and thot attracted others. Ta discourage them, I started the rumor thot tha gold was found, when I gie ta Magpie thot package."

"But you *did* have gold, new gold. You got prosperous of a sudden."

"Aye," McCall admitted uneasily.

"How much was in the package you sent to the bank?"

"A mon's circumstances are his private affair," was the stubborn answer.

"Not in this case. Let's have the straight of it."

MCCALL was distinctly uncomfortable. He turned toward Magpie.

"Ya should be ott there, givin' Shorty a hand, mon," he frowned.

Magpie sniffed. "I kin take a hint when I hain't wanted."

He left them. McCall stepped closer to Steele. His voice was a hushed whisper as he confessed hurriedly.

"Naught a wurrd ta the others, Shuriff. Doc Crabtree, he'd skulp me if he knew. Tha truth is, I won the gold. Close onta two hoondred of it."

"Won it?"

"Aye, up at Cottonwood, when I sold my spring calves less'n a fortnight ago." McCall reddened, as though he was confessing to sheep-stealing. He hung his head and continued shamefacedly: "Mainly at pinochle, Shuriff. Not a wurrd, not a whisper, onderstand?"

A brief gleam of humor lighted Steele's face.

"Reckon I savvy now, how you worked your way out o' jail."

"And I ha' na grudge for my arrest. What's mair, I reelize noo 'twas a friendly act."

"That's correct. Things have been sort o' unsettled around here."

He went outside. The youth with a puffed eye was in a pitiful state of anguish. He had been told that it was by his hand that his brother had died. He sat on the step of the stage, head in hands, moaning.

The older man was conscious now, sprawled out in the stage seat, rubbing the knob on top of his head.

"Yuh figger these cusses shot that old feller in the cabin, Sheriff?" Shorty wanted to know.

Steele directed his question to the leader of the luckless trio.

"How long you hombres been on the prowl hereabouts? You didn't just come down from Cottonwood, like you claimed."

"We been dry-camped two days," was the mumbled retort. "Back in the hills. That ain't no crime, blast you!"

"Why did you lie about it a little while back?"

The young one with the black eye looked up.

"Doke figgered we was on the track o' easy money. Lord, I wish now we'd never heerd o' that Fort Bowie gold!"

"Where *did* you get wind of it?"

"Let him guess, Gabe!" Doke snarled.

The younger man made a despairing gesture. His voice blurted out in a wild rush of words.

"You're right when you say he was a bad one, button. Just how bad, I'll find out. When we get the other one."

"I got it now!" yelped Shorty. "That pair o' lobos, they shot the old-timer, here at the cabin! They aimed to drygulch me the same way! Figgered I was gold hunting, I reckon."

"Nice guessin', *segundo,*" declared Steele.

"Then all we got ahead of us is a straightaway manhunt. When we get hold o' that cuss, this affair'll be over, with all the kinks straightened out!"

"All," chipped in McCall, "except finding tha gold. Whereby I'll ha' use

---

Hot Lead Is the Coin With Which a Lanky Texican Pays Off in

TEXAS GOLD

A Novelet of Vengeance Trails

By MOJAVE LLOYD

•

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

"What's the use? A drunk made some loose talk, up at Cottonwood, in a saloon. Let on as how him and his pardner was on the look-see for seven thousand in cold cash."

"You recollect what the drunk looked like?"

The one called Gabe gathered his faculties with an effort.

"Gawky-built. Not much more'n a kid, but a bad one."

"Happen to notice if he wore this?"

Steele held the turquoise ring under the one good eye.

"Sure! He wore it!"

Steele's bronzed face registered quiet triumph.

for tha shovel I won last night from Doc Crabtree, fair an' proper. Dinna I tell ye, Sheriff, how I coom ta—"

"Don't bother," Steele interrupted. "And don't bother digging any more holes in the scenery, either, Mac, unless it's to plant the victims o' this here epidemic o' gold fever."

"Wha's thot ye say?" cried McCall.

"The rumor you started through Magpie, it's correct now."

"B-but I dinna onderstand!"

Doke, and even the suffering youngster on the stage step were startled. All eyes followed Steele as he reached for the makings.

"Yuh mean the stuff's found?" Mag-

pie, unable to endure the suspense, demanded shrilly.

Steele licked his cigarette shut and scratched a match on a wheel rim.

"Ten tuh one, it was never even hid around here!" scoffed Shorty. "It was just another one o' them wild yarns about buried treasure on the desert. Shucks, there's wild talk like that almost everywhere in the Territory!"

Steele had saved the surprise till the last. He found grim satisfaction now in dallying with it.

"Ye ha' some knowledge thot the Fort Bowie holdups returned 'n' recovered tha cache, eh, Shuriff?" wheedled McCall.

Steele drew a deep inhale.

"Let's get at it thisaway," he drawled. He sent a sudden, sharp look at the stage driver through the curl of smoke from his cigarette.

"Magpie, what did you do with your old hat? After you bought that fancy new one?"

"Wh-why, shucks!" came the surprised answer. "I left 'er hangin' in the barber shop, up at Cottonwood!"

"Sort of odd," Steele replied casually, "that it should turn up here in the line cabin, wouldn't yuh say?"

"What! Yuh mean tuh say my old hat—"

"Specially since the man was killed *before* you got rid o' that old headgear."

"But, Sheriff!" yawped Shorty. "You said the killer didn't go inside the cabin!"

THERE was a sudden stir inside the stage. The man Steele had head-walloped was reaching for the door handle on the opposite side.

"Hold on, Doke!" Steele ordered sharply. "What's the sudden rush?"

In thwarted fury, Doke whirled, his boot-heels stamping over the limp body of his dead young companion.

"It's mine!" he screeched. "Yuh've rawhided me enough, damn yuh! I found it!"

"It'd been yours if you'd found it, sure, Doke. But you stole it. That makes the difference. You stole it from a dead man. Same as you stole Magpie's old hat in the Cottonwood barber shop, which petty grab cost you seven thousand bucks, gold."

The younger man leaped from the step. He made for the stage, bellowing.

"So yuh doublecrossed us, yuh lowdown, crooked sidewinder!"

Steele hauled him back.

"Easy, Gabe. He ain't got it on him. He stashed it where you been digging for it, out at your dry camp."

"He came down for water yestiddy, alone," raged Gabe. "I knowed something was funny when he came back after dark, wearin' a new hat."

"B-but why did Doke steal the second hat?" yelled Shorty. "Why did he do that and leave Magpie's old one, which he was wearin'?"

Steele spread a hand in a gesture that admitted the existence of human quirks that were beyond even his comprehension.

"Some men, they're so plumb avaricious, they can't pass up any chance to steal," he said. "Or else Magpie's old headgear wasn't big enough to hold the gold sewed up inside that big steeple crown. You'll observe, gents, that the stitch marks show just a little, through the band. I happened to notice it when I walloped Doke."

The group was stunned into momentary silence.

Shorty finally broke that silence with an awed exclamation.

"Good gravy, Sheriff! Th' things you can see!"

Again that strange, elusive smile played about Steele's lips.

"Even the pale line around the edge of his hair, like Magpie's. Doke, as you observe yore own self now, had a recent haircut. That bolsters up Magpie's story, though Magpie ain't told the whole truth yet."

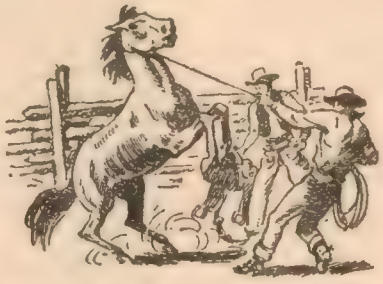
"You insinuatin' I'm a liar?" yapped the stage driver.

"Partly. The fact is, Magpie, what

led you to the unusual act o' buyin' anything new, even a hat? Yore own hat was stole while you snoozed in the barber's chair. That's the straight of it, ain't it?"

Magpie's indignation seeped out of him.

"Shucks, seems like you know just about everything, Sheriff!" he admitted sheepishly.



Sheriff Blue Steele and Deputy Shorty Watts Lock Horns With a Passel of Hoss Thieves in

PAINTED POST DEFIANCE

Another Exciting Complete Novelet

By TOM GUNN

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

"I want a better-looking shave—
A blade priced so I really save!"

"The Thin Gillette, men are agreed,
Gives greater comfort, too—and speed!"

The Thin Gillette Blade is Produced By the Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

WHIPSAW

By CORDWELL STAPLES

Red Cody Matches His Guns Against Rustler Guile When Trouble Stalks the Arizona Range!

THE hot Arizona sun had just slid up over the peaks of the Gilas, but already it burned down with deadly impact. The all pervading smell of sun baked mesquite brush was strong in Red Cody's nostrils as he heeled his big claybank gelding down into the draw, under cover of a stand of timber. His tall lean figure swung easily to the motion of the horse.

Another odor came to Red on the faint breeze. It was the acrid smell of singed hair and wood smoke that drifted down to him. He heard the bawling of cattle.

Red Cody wheeled the big claybank up the draw. The horse tossed his head and snorted.

"Git along, Chico. What's the matter, old boy? Smell that hair a-singein'?" Red growled, half under his breath.

A quarter mile more and Red Cody pulled his horse up and stepped down. He carefully crawled to the rim of the draw, pulled his John B. from his shock of red hair and peered out from under a clump of thorny mesquite. His blue eyes changed to an icy glare. He cursed steadily, fluently.

Cody saw a tall, skinny, light haired puncher shaking out a loop. He saw him knee his roping pony into the fringe of a small drove of beef, while

Paint fell as Cody fired!

two other waddies kept the little herd together.

The loop whirled. A yearling steer charged, bawling as the rope settled and the range-wise pony braced his legs. The steer went down heavily.

The tall puncher stepped down, worked his way down the tight twist and knelt on the steer's wildly tossing head. The fellow yanked a piggin' string from his belt, looped, wrapped and tied. His call, "Hot iron," came faintly down the breeze.

A CHUNKY, black haired cowboy yanked the red iron from the little chip fire, slapped the ashes away on his chaps and high heeled to the catch. A little bluish cloud of smoke arose from the left flank of the bawling critter.

"Caught 'em at it, finally," Red Cody muttered. "Here's where I deal me a hand in that game."

There had been an epidemic of cattle rustling. Cody suspected that there was more behind it than an attempt to raise beef the easy way. Concentrating on him and his neighbor, Jim Daniels, it seemed like an effort to break them up and get them out of the country. Amos Mudge, the squint-eyed banker in Two Arrows, had long wanted Cody's Fly-C and the adjoining J-D spread.

Slipping up and identifying the wide loopers by snatches of conversation was the thing to do. Even though the shifty banker had put the thieves on the job, it would take plenty of proving. But Red Cody had to ignore his best play. Some distance back, from a wooded ridge of the Gilas, he had spotted big Jim Daniels and Fern, his daughter, galloping rapidly around the hill and toward that scene on the flat below.

He'd know Fern's mean little paint horse anywhere, nor was there any mistaking her wind blown blond curls and blue silk blouse. She and her father were riding right into a pack of desperadoes who would shoot on sight. The wind was in the wrong direction, and Jim Daniels would not smell the stench of burning hair in time to warn his daughter that trouble was ahead.

It was up to Cody to take a hand before his friends rode into the trap, and forget trying to get information. He ran back to his horse and mounted up. Red yanked the saddle gun from its boot under his left leg. He tested the magazine with a shell to make sure it was fully loaded. The twin-matched Colts thonged low on his thighs also were carefully examined.

Red Cody had been mighty proud of his little Fly-C spread. Happy, too at the way Fern Daniels showed her preference for him at the dances over in the little cow town of Two Arrows. He had built a fine, comfortable ranchhouse on his place and was looking forward to the day he would bring Fern there to rule over it.

Then, suddenly, an early summer had cracked down with a withering, glaring sun. Week after week passed with no rain. The thorny mesquite wilted and went gray. Prairie grass and upland mesa turned sere and buff. Lacking the heavy, soaking spring rains, the waterholes dried up. And then, Amos Mudge put on the screws; that overdue note!

Cody cocked his rifle, put the big claybank to the side of the draw and raked him with steel. The gelding grunted, shot up the bank with powerful thrusts of his haunches and was away across the flat on a dead run. Chico was not used to spurs. He resented them.

THE black haired puncher at the chip fire heard the drumming of Chico's hoofs. He threw down the iron and ran for his horse, yelling. The slim roper yanked his rifle from its boot. Red Cody heard the buzz of lead.

Cody held his fire. Good shooting at eight hundred yards from the back of a running horse was impossible.

All four rustlers were firing desperately. That meant that they were firing inaccurately. But the hum of bullets past the big claybank was like a swarm of bees.

The little herd of cattle stampeded to the brush. Cody threw Chico right and left as he closed in on the rustlers, to make their target harder to hit. At two hundred yards he swung the horse in a wide circle and opened fire with his rifle. He was shooting at a stationary target—the rustlers were at a disadvantage. They quickly realized this and fed steel to their mounts.

As he rode his circle at a full run, Cody glimpsed Fern and Jim as they rounded the hill and got their first view of the fight.

He tightened his circling run, firing coolly. A man fell and lay still. The others spurred for the hills. A horse staggered, went down in a heap. His rider rolled with the fall and came up on his feet at a dead run. He raced toward the tall puncher's horse and reached for a stirrup to help himself along. The tall rider swung at the hand with his rifle barrel.

Red closed in as the man flung himself around and made a pass for his six-gun. His bullet knocked the rustler flat before his gun cleared leather. He lay sprawled, motionless.

CODY heard a gun blasting behind him. He wheeled, his rifle ready. It was Jim Daniels, taking a few last shots at the rustlers.

"Hey, you, Red, what's goin' on here?" Jim shouted as he and Fern pulled their horses to a rearing halt. Daniels had a smoking saddle gun in his hands.

"Rustlers," Red growled. "Caught 'em workin' a runnin' iron on yore critters."

Fern wheeled her paint mare up alongside Red's big gelding.

"You're not hurt, are you, Red?" she asked anxiously.

Red grinned shyly. The color deepened on his tanned face.

"No, honey. Nary a scratch. But I sure ran them wide loopers off."

"Here's two that forgot to run, Red," Jim Daniels said grimly. "Don't reck'n I ever seen either of these hombres before. Strangers on this range. Hired gunnies, I guess." He was looking over the possessions of the two rustlers on the ground.

"I'm bettin' Ol' Mudge is behind all this. That ol' scoundrel's been tryin' to buy me out cheap, ever since my note came due and this danged dry spell hit us. Mighty lucky that note didn't have a mortgage securin' it."

"Now, Red. Don't start guessing. Surely a banker wouldn't do a thing like that," Fern cut in.

"Well, maybe not. But I'm goin' to see that ol' buzzard just the same. Grazin' don't look so good even in the high meadows, up in the Gila Mountains. I just been prospectin' that country. It ain't had much more rain than we had down here. If I had money to buy some feed, I might tide the critters over and have a good start next season."

"Ever ask him fer a loan of feed money, Red?" Jim asked.

"Yeah. But he always puts me off. Tries to buy me out, cheap. Old Bill Turner, Mudge's partner in the bank, would let me have it in a minute, but Mudge is the boss there. Talks Turner down every time he opens his mouth to me."

"Let's forget our troubles for today, Red," Fern said. "Come on over to my place and have dinner with us."

A grin spread over Cody's grim face.

"Sounds good, Fern. Gettin' kinda tired of my own cookin'. These two hombres, though; we can't just leave 'em for the buzzards. Got to go past my home ranch, too, an'—"

"Come on, Red. I'll send out a couple o' hands to plant them skunks," Jim Daniels cut in. "Do yuh good to forget your troubles fer a spell. We'll ride over past your range on our way."

The three riders passed bunches of

Red Cody's cattle, trying to keep themselves alive on the stunted grass and long yellow pods of the mesquite beans. Cody was driven to desperation by the sight of the lean, tortured animals. Looked like even nature was siding the devil, against him.

Gazing across the dried up hills as they loped along, Red's worried gaze showed him only sun-devils—whirlwinds sweeping over the flats, herding rolling tumbleweeds. The rotting carcasses of his cows dotted the range. Buzzard meat.

As if this wasn't enough, his beef had commenced to disappear by threes and fours and dozens. The rustlers that worked the little spread were slick. They seemed to know just where and when to do their thieving.

RED had investigated and found that Amos Mudge hadn't lost a single head on his ranches, farther north. He had water, too; a small lake that he had made by damming up a little stream.

"Jim, if I just had money to buy feed," Red growled. "Look at them desperate, bawlin' critters. I've held off as long as I can, hopin' for a little rain. Never saw such an early summer. I'm goin' in to Two Arrows to see old Mudge, right after dinner. Try to raise some money."

"Watch out, Red. That old buzzard'll skin yuh outa yore spread." Jim Daniels' tone was grim. "If he gets yore range, he'll have me hemmed in. He'll dam up the stream from yore spring, small as it is, an' shut off my water supply. Then he'll have both our spreads."

"Don't worry, Jim. He'll never get my range."

That afternoon Red Cody loped down the main street of Two Arrows, a fine cloud of dust trailing him. Town odors surging from store and saloon along the twin lines of false fronts drove the clean smells of the open range from his nostrils. He puffed his breath out, impatiently.

Red Cody put up his horse and walked slowly into the bank. Amos Mudge had an oily smile for him.

"Come in, Cody. Come right in," he said. "Have a chair."

Red looked around. Bill Turner was nowhere in sight in the banking rooms.

Red seated himself, tilted his chair back, carefully leaned his Stetson against the wall and built a brown paper quirly. He was silent until he had taken a couple of deep draws, let the smoke drift lazily from his nostrils. Cody was about to speak when Mudge suddenly turned from his desk.

"Cody, I think I can tell you what you are here for," the banker smiled. "You need money to feed the critters you have left. Am I right?"

"Well, I figured that if I could—"

"Exactly! Thought so. Well, I always aim to be fair," Mudge snapped. "But, Cody, you're licked. You already owe me money. I've got to look out for myself. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you five thousand for your spread, lock, stock and barrel —everything. And I'll wipe out the five thousand you already owe me, in the bargain. That's fair enough. What say?"

Cody's tight drawn features cracked into a grim smile. He laughed at Mudge.

"Why, dang it all, man, you know my spread's worth five times what I'd owe you, even with another five thousand," he growled. "This dry spell can't last long, and with money to feed, I can tide over. Then, at next roundup I could easy pay you out in full."

Little Amos Mudge wasn't used to being laughed at.

"A few more months and you'll laugh a different tune, cowboy," he snapped curtly. "You'd better take my offer right now. I won't repeat it."

RED CODY'S eyes narrowed. He rose quickly to his feet.

"Banker, I'm a man that takes a

heap o' lickin'," he said evenly. "I'm not through yet. An' neither you nor your gang of rustlin' skunks can make me quit."

He banged the desk with his fist.

"I ain't begun to fight yet, Mudge, and I'm aimin' to make you danged sorry you ever seen my spread."

Cody stamped out of the bank. Mudge gazed after him, his expression a queer mixture of fear and greed.

From the window of his room in the Drovers Hotel, Red saw Two Arrows start to fill up. It was Saturday afternoon and the town was coming alive with waddies from all the big spreads. They came loping in off the range by pairs and groups. The air was filled with a fine fog of dust. Women folks clustered under the board awning of the general store, renewing old friendships and exchanging news. Then, Red saw Jim Daniels and Fern come loping down the street. He cleaned himself up quickly and descended to the sidewalk.

Cody was just in time to see Fern join a group of girls and head into the general store. He took one look in through the doors at the chattering group and then hastily turned away and went into the Long Horn Bar. Somehow, he never knew quite what to do with his hands or feet, when in the presence of a crowd of girls.

Red Cody bellied up to the bar and poured his drink. Cuddling the glass in his rope-burned palms, he turned around to look the crowd over.

He almost dropped his drink as he spotted two punchers sitting at a table near the door, staring at him. One of them was tall and slim, light haired. The other, black haired, heavy set. Cody would have taken his oath these were two of the men he had surprised working a running iron on Jim Daniels' critters, that same morning. Despite himself, Cody paid grudging tribute to their nerve.

He gulped his liquor, loosened his guns in their holsters, just as the two rustlers walked quickly out into the street. Once there, Red saw them hurry to their mounts and leave town at a gallop.

And he saw something else that excited his curiosity. Amos Mudge, the wizened banker, was stepping along toward the Long Horn with quick, birdlike steps, his ridiculous hard hat perched precisely on his head.

Mudge pushed the batwing doors open and peered inside. His eyes lit on Red Cody. He hurried to a table, seated himself and called briskly. "Mister Cody, I have a word for you."

The little man fidgeted nervously as Cody strolled slowly toward him.

"Cody," Mudge began, in his precise tones, "I'm here to talk about your range again. I own all the range in Mono Valley except yours and Jim Daniels'."

The banker lowered his voice almost to a whisper. His small greenish eyes glittered.

"I'm determined to have your spread. I've made you a fair offer. You're a fool to try to hang on. You'll go broke, sure. Now, I'll add five thousand more to my previous figure. I want your final answer. Now!"

RED gazed steadily at Mudge, pushed his hat back, fished the makin's out of a shirt pocket and started to build a cigarette. He made no reply to the banker until he had the smoke drifting lazily from his nostrils. Then, a slow smile spread over his tanned face.

"I don't reck'lect hearin' you make any offer to Jim Daniels for *his* spread," he said slowly. "No, Mudge. my place ain't for sale. I'll see all my critters die on the range before I'll sell to you."

"Come now, Cody. Don't cut off your nose to spite your face. I'm offering fifteen thousand in cash. That's a lot of money. You could locate elsewhere, maybe do well. I have the papers all made out, at the bank. Shall we step down there?" The little man

half rose hopefully from his chair.

Abruptly, the grin left Cody's face. His jaw hardened.

"Mudge, I'm givin' you two minutes to get out of here," he said. "I know yore rotten game. My range in yore hands and you'll shut off Daniels' water and squeeze the everlastin' daylights outa him, till he'll be glad to take five thousand or less for his spread. Now, move, yuh range grabbin' skunk or I'll just naturally gunwhip you loco." Red's hand dropped to the butt of one of his Colts.

Amos Mudge's face paled. He rose hastily, upsetting his chair.

"Cody, I'm not a gun fighter. I'm a man of peace," he blustered. "But no one can threaten me and get away with it. And no one can laugh at me. I'll make you regret what you've just said before you're many days older. Then, I'll get your range at my own figure. You needn't look to Bill Turner for help. I'll block that."

He turned and hurried out the door, just as Jim Daniels strolled in.

Daniels was feeling pretty good. He had met many of his old partners and had done some celebrating.

"Hi yuh, Red," he hailed. "What yuh scowling about?"

"That little varmint, Mudge. Got his plans made to get my range, an' then squeeze you out. I oughta drill 'im. Let's ride, Jim. Where's Fern?"

"Can't, Red. Fern got us asked to supper at Joe Bond's house here in Two Arrows, tonight. That gal just leads me around by the nose, son." He gave Cody a whack on the back. "Fern'll be leadin' you by the nose, some day soon, too, if you don't look out. Gotta go clean up, now. S'long, Red." Daniels strode out.

Red poured another drink, undecided whether to ride home or stay the evening in town. He had counted on Fern's company that evening and felt vaguely hurt at being alone. . . .

Darkness had long fallen when he pushed through the doors of the Long Horn and strolled toward the hotel, and supper. A cool breeze was blowing in off the range. Lights threw their beams across the plank sidewalks from open windows. Riders raced down the street, eager for the pleasures of the little cow town after the weeks work. Jangling music blared from the dance hall, down past the hotel. The smell of dust mingled with stale odors of spilled whiskey and tobacco smoke from the bars.

Red went slowly up the stairs to his room in the hotel, to wash up for supper. He threw his Stetson at the bed, then paused in astonishment.

A NOTE lay underneath the door. It had his name printed on it. A grin spread over his face. That note would be from Fern. He snatched it up and tore it open. He stared, and strode quickly to the lamp. The note read:

"We got the Daniels gal. Bring twenty thousand in gold money to the old line cabin on the Hassayampa, where Big Horn Creek comes in. And you better come alone. If you bring a posse, we'll know they're coming and you'll never see the gal again. Don't carry no guns with you. We ain't foolin'."

The note was not signed.

"Kidnaped! Twenty thousand! Fern kidnaped!" Cody snatched his hat and went bounding downstairs, headed for Joe Bond's house. He met Jim Daniels, just outside the hotel.

"Seen Fern anywhere, Red?" Daniels blurted, anxiously. "She came down from Jim Bond's house to get something at the store, an' she didn't come back."

Red Cody handed him the note.

"Kidnaped! My little gal!" Daniels whispered. "Come on, Red. We got to get Sheriff Cochran, pronto. Them danged skunks! Wait'll I lay my hands on 'em."

"Don't do it, Jim. We got to handle this ourselves. They'd spot a posse. Probably got guards out. No tellin' what they'd do to Fern. They got the drop on us."

Daniels thought a minute. "Guess

you're right, Red. But where can I get twenty thousand?"

"We got to get it, that's all. We got to borrow."

"Fern's my little gal, Red. I'll borrow on my place. Ol' Mudge is just gotta loan me the money, that's all Come on. We'll go to his house tonight."

But Mudge was not in his house and no amount of search revealed his whereabouts. Red and Jim were forced to wait until morning.

Mudge met them as they came into the bank next day. His face wore a strained look. There was a watchful, calculating look in his eyes.

JIM DANIELS came straight to the point.

"Mudge, I gotta have twenty thousand, quick. In gold. I'll give a mortgage on my spread."

"Might I ask, what this money is to be used for?" he purred.

"Can't tell yuh now. Let yuh know in a few days," Daniels said. "Do I get the money?"

"Ah, yes. Twenty thousand on your ranch." Mudge pondered for a minute. "I'm afraid I couldn't do that Mr. Daniels," he said, finally. "It wouldn't be enough security, considering the dry season, and the fact that your water supply is limited. No—no, that's impossible."

"Why, dang it all, you know my place is worth over twice that much," Daniels burst out. "It's plumb good security."

Mudge held up his hand. "Considering that it's the bank's money, Mr. Daniels, I believe I am the best judge of that." A greedy look came into his eyes. "Now, if a mortgage on Mr. Cody's spread were included as security—"

An hour later, Red and Jim Daniels were galloping toward Daniels' ranch. In Red's saddle bags there were two bags of gold double eagles, ten thousand in each bag. Mudge held mortgages on each of their ranches. At one swoop, he had bagged them both. The banker had insisted on a mortgage time limit of six months.

The memory of Mudge's crafty smile, as he insisted that he couldn't give them more than six months was still vivid in Red's mind. He thought he saw through the whole scheme. But thinking and proving were two vastly different things.

They paused at Daniels' place only long enough to throw an *aparejo* on a pack horse, and diamond hitch their soogan to it. Then they hit the trail south for the Hassayampa. They camped for the night, about thirty miles from the line cabin.

Twenty miles from the cabin, next day, they separated. Daniels branched off to the west, through the low ridges of the Gila range, taking the pack horse.

"Don't forget what I told you, Pop. If this don't work, we're sunk," Cody said.

"I ain't forgetting," Jim Daniels answered, and took a flat, square parcel from his saddle bag. "The sun's about right, too."

When Red came within a few miles of the cabin, he was halted by an order, "Hold up, thar," from a patch of brush. He pulled Chico to his haunches. A masked man emerged from cover, his rifle ready.

"Git goin'. An' don't try no tricks," he commanded.

Cody and his guard came over a low ridge. Below them lay the small log line cabin. Smoke came from the chimney. Big Horn Creek babbled past the west end of the shack. Spreading cottonwoods grew in the clearing.

AS THEY came in sight, three masked men crowded out the door and stood watching them ride up. When Cody pulled his horse to a stop and reached to unbuckle his saddle bags, the hands of all three dropped to their guns.

Red lifted out the bags of gold. He hesitated before dismounting.

"How do I know you got Fern here?" he said. "How do I know you ain't killed her? Let's see her."

"Never mind with that," a tall thin puncher growled. "Let's get our hands on that gold. He ain't leavin' fer a spell, nohow. I want—"

"Shut up, Paint. I'll run this," a big burly fellow cut in. He turned to Red. "Fair enough," he grinned. "Don't hurt to look. Seein' you brought the gold, you can see the gal. But I'm tellin' yuh right now, we aim to keep yuh here fer quite a spell—the gal too. An' if yuh don't git snuffy, yuh won't have no reason to growl."

He turned to the tall puncher. "Paint, open that window shutter, so's the gal kin look out."

Fern's face appeared at the window.

"Oh, Red, I'm so glad you're here," she cried. "Is Dad all right?"

Cody dismounted, a bag of gold in each hand and strode toward her.

"Sure, he's all right, honey. You'll be seein' him soon."

He contrived to glance toward a low ridge, to the west. What he saw satisfied him. He stepped toward the outlaws, jingling a bag full of gold coin in each hand.

Suddenly, a blinding flash of light flared full into the eyes of the outlaws. It came as a complete surprise. The mirrored glare dazzled them. They were helpless for an instant, and they knew it. So did Cody, who had told Fern's father to take the looking glass from over the wash stand at the house.

"Here's yer damned gold," Red Cody shouted. The buckskin bags weighed thirty pounds each. He smashed them full into the faces of two of the outlaws, first one and then the other, before they could draw. The impact stunned them. He leaped in, slugging right and left with hard fists.

Cody knocked the big leader's head back against the cabin logs, dazing him. A quick grab and he had the man's six-gun.

The guard who had brought Red in, leaped from his horse and came charging into the fight. He dared not fire for fear of hitting his own men, but he had his rifle clubbed and raised.

Fern had scrambled halfway out the window, a stick of firewood in her hand.

"Look out, Red. Behind you!" she screamed.

Cody jumped clear and wheeled. As his bullet hit the guard, the man froze, then slowly crumpled.

A SHOWER of rifle slugs chunked into the cabin wall and a wild yelling came from the low ridge to the west. Fern waded in, swinging her club.

"It's a posse. I'm hightailin'," the big bandit yelled. He crawled to the corner, jumped to his feet and ran for his horse.

The other two men dodged around the corner. The man called Paint had snatched up one of the bags of gold. Cody leaped in pursuit. As he came around the corner, Paint wheeled, dropped the bag and threw up his gun.

There were two reports, one a fraction before the other. Then, Paint whirled, took two uncertain steps and slid on his face. The other outlaws were hightailing across the flat, lying low on their horses' withers.

Jim Daniels came zigzagging his horse down the steep slope of the ridge to the west. In his hand he carried a good sized mirror.

"This lookin' glass shore did jar 'em, didn't it, Red," he chuckled. "Yore plan worked fine. Ain't hurt, are yuh? I—Well, doggone! When I was young, I did my courtin' kinda on the sly. You two ain't got no shame, a-tall."

Two days later, soon after the bank opened for the day in Two Arrows, Fern, Jim Daniels and Red Cody strode in. Red carried two bags of gold double eagles in his hands.

As they walked in, Mudge stared, unbelieving. His face paled and his

jaw fell. His lips moved but no sound came from them.

Red walked up to the counter and banged down the two sacks of gold.

"Didn't expect to see us so soon, did yuh, Mudge? Well, I'm payin' off. I want my notes an' mortgage back."

The banker at last recovered his balance.

"Now, Mr. Cody," he purred. "There is no call to hurry. Your mortgage has nearly six months to run. Since you didn't have need for your money, I could offer you some excellent investments, Mr. Cody. You could easily double your money. You too, Mr. Daniels."

"Not any, Mudge. Not any. Jim and I are clearin' my place. I want my notes an' my mortgage. Pronto!"

"If you insist, Mr. Cody. If you insist."

The papers in his hand, Red Cody grinned. "Now, Mudge, just go ahead and foreclose on Jim, in six months. And the day you do, I'm damming up my spring and shuttin' off the stream of water on his range. Just like you was figurin' on doin', squeezing Jim out an' gettin' his place cheap, once you got my spread. If you play poker, maybe you heard of whipsawin' a sucker, which is what we done to you.

"I still got near five thousand to feed our beef over the dry spell," Red went on. "What you think of that, Mudge?"

ON THE porch of the bank, Bill Turner met them. Talk became general. Everybody in Two Arrows country liked honest Bill Turner as heartily as they disliked his partner, Mudge.

Red Cody stood where he could see through the bank windows. He was building a smoke, a broad grin on his weatherbeaten face. He looked up from the chore just in time to see Mudge slipping out the back door of the bank.

Red followed. He had expected something like this, though he had not anticipated such an obvious move now.

Ten minutes later, he was crouching outside a small board cabin on the outskirts of Two Arrows.

Red was in time to hear Mudge say, "You bungling, stupid fools. You let Cody and Daniels outwit you. Why didn't you kill them when they resisted? Now I'll never get the Cody spread. Daniels' spread will be worthless."

"Hold on, now, Mudge," a thick voice growled. "We done the best we could. Who took all the risk o' gettin' shot up, you or us? Now don't you git snuffy, Mudge, or—"

"I'll turn you over to the sheriff for rustlin' and kidnapin', and I won't pay you a cent," Mudge interrupted, his voice rising to a high whine. "That's what I'll do. They'll believe me before they will you, you range tramps."

Cody had heard enough. He kicked the door open and leaped inside, his guns blazing. The two outlaws in the place slapped leather. The roar of the big .45s was deafening in the little room.

Cody felt a searing stab along his ribs. The impact of the slug knocked him back a step.

One of the outlaws—the big burly leader—was down, motionless. Mudge crouched in a corner near the back door, his arms in front of his face. The other owlhooter wheeled and dove headlong through the window in a crash of broken glass. Red Cody whipped a quick shot at him and heard him scream.

Red was holstering his guns as Sheriff Cochran and his deputy charged in, followed by a crowd of town men. Jim Daniels and Fern came racing to the shack with the crowd.

Talk ran high as Cody explained to the sheriff. Mudge had risen to his feet, edged along the wall in the welter of gun smoke.

Fern glanced at the burly outlaw leader. Then, she looked closer.

"Why," she cried, "that's one of the men who kidnaped me. They were all masked, but I can tell by that stitching on his boots." She shrank back against Red.

SUDDENLY, talk quieted as a loud drumming of hoofbeats back of the cabin came to their ears. Red wheeled, looked for Mudge. He had disappeared — slipped out the back door, and now he was riding while he had a chance.

Bill Turner sauntered up, casually.

"Well, Red, that sorta cleans things up for you an' Jim, don't it? Don't mind sayin' it takes a load off my mind, too, son. Jim, you come over to the bank an' see me. Reck'n we can do something 'bout that short term note o' yours to give it a few more birthdays, now that my pardner's hightailed, which is better'n the state givin' him free board."

Fern and Red were very close as they walked away from the cabin. Jim Daniels' smile was both proud and sad as he looked after them.

"Reck'n I'll be losin' my little gal soon," he confided to Bill Turner.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

A Courageous Hombre Rides Home to Face a Grim Six-Gun Encounter in THE PIMA KID, *a Fast-Action Yarn by* FRANK CARL YOUNG

●

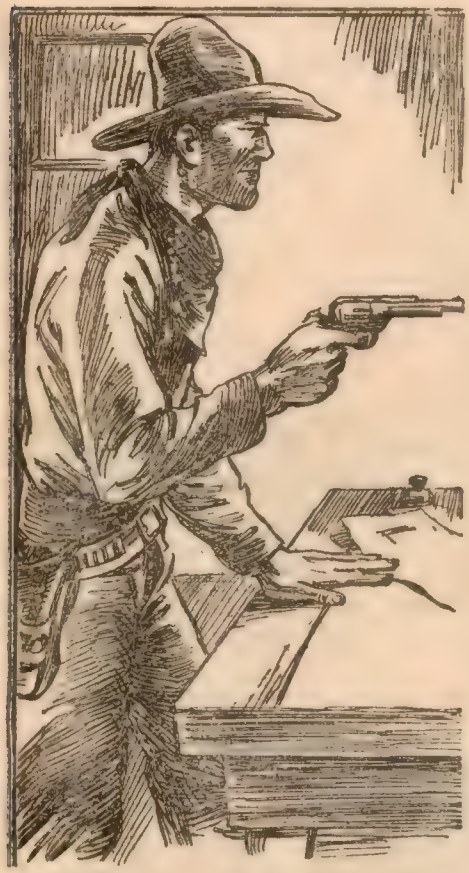
A Drifter Dares Boot Hill

By GUNNISON STEELE

Author of "Killer Grit," "Renegade's Choice," etc.

MURDER stalked that dark strip that lay along Coldwater's street between the livery stable and the garish lights of the nearest saloon.

But Bill Craig did not know that. Drifting leisurely southward before a chilling wind toward his native sunny Texas, he had arrived in Coldwater only a few moments before.



"Easy, gents," Craig rapped, "and mebbe yuh won't get hurt"

He had left his bronc and warbag at the livery and set forth in search of food and drink to warm his big, wolf-lean body. It was not late, yet the street seemed almost deserted. Craig could see several horses at a rack in front of the saloon, but almost the only other sign of life was when boot heels thudded hollowly as a shadowy figure came along the boardwalk on the opposite side of the street.

Craig had been fashioning a quirly as he walked along. He paused in the deeper shadows of a building, hand upraised. But he didn't strike the match that was in his hand. He tensed suddenly, straining his eyes across the street.

The thudding boot heels had stopped abruptly. A startled curse came to Craig's ears. Then there were two shadowy figures over there, instead of one. The second had slid suddenly from the gaping black mouth of an alley.

The outlines of the two men were vague against the background of the alley. Craig could only sense that one of them held a gun in his hand, and that something sinister was about to happen over there.

"What in unholy tarnation—" he heard a voice bark.

AND a low, snarling voice that held a nasal twang replied:

"Shut up! And get into that alley, or I'll cut yuh in two!"

Bill Craig, Wandering Waddy, Braves Death and a Hang-Noose for the Sake of an Oppressed Girl!

There was a stir of movement across the street—and then before Bill Craig's eyes was only the gaping black mouth of the alley.

Craig stood a moment, unlighted quirly between his lips, straining eyes and ears. He could not hear or see anything over there now. What had just happened seemed sort of unreal—as if he were seeing queer things.

Then suddenly the big Texan knew his eyes had not been playing tricks on him. The alley across the street boiled with quick sound and movement.

"Yuh damn, murderin' skunks, I'm onto yore game!" a voice yelped. There was the sound of a struggle in the alley, as if a fight to the death was going on.

Like a big cat Bill Craig bounded into the street, went leaping across toward the alley-mouth. Long ago he had found that a drifter could find plenty of trouble without looking for it, and ordinarily, he backed up to keep from mixing in something that was none of his business. But this was different! He refused to stand by and see an old man ganged and murdered!

When he was halfway across the street, an agonized scream spewed from the alley. The scream choked off into a gurgle that held blood. Boot heels beat a tattoo against the ground.

Six-gun in hand, Craig lunged into the black maw of the alley. The shadows churned with movement, and boot heels thudded again as two shapeless figures slunk away from something that lay on the ground.

The narrow alley rocked with gun thunder as Craig blazed a couple of quick shots at the retreating figures. By the gunpowder torch he saw two men as they bounded from the back end of the alley and vanished. And he saw also the stark, motionless figure lying in the dirt and filth of the alley.

Bill Craig leaped over the figure, plunged to the back of the alley. Warily, he paused. But there was no sound, no sign of the two killers. They were gone.

He stumbled back to the man on the ground. He knelt, put out his hand—and drew it back quickly as it encountered something warm and sticky. He scratched a match. Grim-eyed, he stared down at the wiry, gray-bearded man whose features were set in a ghastly death mask. Blood gushed in a stream from a gaping wound in the oldster's throat, and beside him, on the ground, lay a red-smeared, bone-handled skinning knife.

Bill Craig had the Texan's hatred and contempt for knife-fighters.

"The gizzard-slittin' skunks!" he muttered fiercely, and took the blood-smeared knife gingerly in his hand.

But the knife told him nothing. A dozen like it might be seen every day.

Thudding boots and excited voices jerked the Texan back to reality. Murky light from a lantern struck his eyes. Behind the lantern Bill could see half a dozen shadow figures. They came forward and hemmed him in. The lantern was held by a big, square-jawed young fellow who held a long-barreled six-shooter in his other hand. On his breast gleamed a badge.

"Gabe Runnels, by Gawd!" said a taut voice. "And his throat's slit from ear to ear!"

Craig straightened, the bloody knife still in his hand. His eyes circled the ring of faces about him, and a chill feeling washed over him. Those faces were hard, unfriendly, suspicious. He saw the square-jawed sheriff look at the sprawled figure on the ground, then at the knife in the stranger's hand.

He saw the muzzle of the gun in the sheriff's hand turn toward him.

"What's wrong here?" the lawman

snapped. "Why'd yuh kill old Gabe Runnels?"

Again that cold feeling touched Bill Craig, but was supplanted instantly by a quick surge of anger. His lanky body stiffened with the realization that he was being accused of murder. Again his gaze circled the condemning faces ringing him. Another thing he had learned was that a strange town was quick to judge a saddle-drifter.

"Yuh're crazy as hell if you think I done this!" he grunted. "It was a coupla other gents. I tried to stop 'em—"

"Now ain't that fine?" sneered a voice. "He saw a coupla gents, and tried to stop 'em. How about that knife in yore hand, hombre?"

A jolt that was almost like a blow went through Bill Craig. His eyes lifted slowly to the owner of that voice—a squat, hawk-faced man with pouting lips and black, cruel little eyes. The squat man was standing beside the sheriff. On the squat man's left stood a slender, red-headed hombre with cougarlike eyes that gleamed in the lantern light.

But the Texan's narrowed eyes were fixed on the squat man, and he was hearing a snarling, nasal voice say: "Shut up! And get into that alley, or I'll cut yuh in two!" That voice had held that same nasal twang that he had now heard again!

Fierce anger and triumph rioted through Bill Craig. Here before him was one of the killers who had scurried out of the alley before him just a few moments before. The other was probably the red-headed dude beside the squat man. They had just circled back to the main street and come in with the others.

But Craig's triumph quickly died, and wariness took its place. He could not prove that. He could not even prove there had been anybody else in the alley. On the faces of the men surrounding him he saw plain unbelief.

"I'm tellin' the truth," he said quietly. "I saw part of what happened, but got here too late to stop it. I fired them shots yuh heard, at the gents that done this. Here, I'll show yuh!"

He broke his gun, ejecting the shells into his hand, including the two empties. The sheriff took the gun from his hand, and shook his head slowly.

"Mebbe yuh're tellin' the truth, hombre," he said grimly. "I dunno. But it looks bad for yuh. These spooky gents yuh mention—did yuh get a good look at 'em?"

Bill Craig shook his head. "It was too dark. Mebbe"—his eyes turned abruptly on the squat, hook-nosed man—"I got a way of knowin' who one of the skunks was, though!"

HE SAW a cruel light flare briefly in the squat man's inky eyes, and knew the shot had gone home.

"What way is that?" asked the sheriff.

But before Craig could answer there was a commotion in the alley. The crowd parted to let a slim figure through—a dark-eyed young girl, dressed in boots and man's shirt and jeans. She stood an instant, her slender, rounded body tense, staring wide-eyed at the figure on the ground. Then, a sob in her throat, she flung herself to the ground and lifted the dead man's head into her arms.

Bill Craig stared down at the girl, a stricken light in his eyes, a cold flame of rage licking at his heart as he saw the stunned, bewildered look on the girl's face. He saw the hostility deepen on the faces of the men about him. Craig's eyes flicked quickly about. Now, he knew, while the attention of the crowd was diverted, was his chance for escape from this sinister hang-noose trap that was threatening to close upon him. He stood better than an even chance of making it.

That had been in Craig's mind a moment before. But now he thrust

it aside. He watched as the girl rose slowly to her feet. He saw her brush a hand across her bewildered eyes. Then suddenly her slim body was vibrantly rigid, her young eyes ablaze with hatred and anger.

"Who killed my daddy?" she demanded.

Boots shuffled uneasily. Then the sheriff said:

"We don't know for sure, Miss Ann."

"Why don't we?" cut in the squat man. "Ann, there's the polecat that killed yore dad—a two-bit saddle-bum. We caught him cold!"

Ann Runnel's blazing eyes jerked to Bill Craig. Deliberately, filled with

hate and hot desire for vengeance, they raked the Texan's lean, powerful figure. Speechless, shrinking inwardly under the almost physical lash of those scornful, flaying eyes, Craig returned her gaze steadily.

"Why did you do it?" the girl asked softly.

"I didn't do it," Craig said, and was surprised to find how earnestly he wanted this dark-eyed girl to believe him. "It's all a pack of lies. I can't prove I didn't do it, but I swear I'm tellin' the truth."

"Yuh'll hang for it, jest the same," sneered a nasal voice.

The girl wrenched her gaze from Craig's tall figure. She looked wordlessly at the squat man and the red-haired hombre. For long seconds there was tense silence. Then the hook-nosed man grinned smirkingly, and stepped forward very slowly, hat in hand.

"I'm sorry about this, Ann," he said, with an easy familiarity that somehow sent fresh resentment rushing over Bill Craig. "Yuh shouldn't be here. Come, I'll take yuh back to the hotel."

But, still without speaking, Ann Runnels turned away from him, and back to the sheriff.

"Jim," she said, "did you look in his pockets? When daddy left the hotel an hour ago he had fifteen hundred dollars on him, money he'd got for the cows we shipped this evening. That money was to go to Turk and Todd Raven, to pay off a note they held against the Lazy K. Daddy thought maybe they'd be in town, and went out to look for them."

The sheriff stooped over the dead man, went quickly through his pockets. He straightened, jabbed his gun into Bill Craig's stomach.

"Search him!" he said tersely to the bystanders.

But beyond a few dollars in a sweat-stained wallet, they found no money on Bill Craig.

"Mebbe I swallowed that money," the Texan grunted.

"Funny, huh?" clipped the sheriff. "Mebbe a rope about yore neck will change that!" The lawman turned to the hook-nosed man and the redhead, and asked: "Turk, did you and Todd see Gabe Runnels before this happened?"

"Turk" Raven, the squat man, shook his shaggy head with apparent regret.

"We shore didn't, Jim. Me and Todd had jest rode into town. We'd stopped at Jake Fargo's place to buy supplies, when we heard the shots. Looks queer, that money disappearin'. But I got a hunch that saddle-bum knows where it went."

Grim-eyed, the sheriff turned to Bill Craig. He motioned with his gun-muzzle.

"Start walkin'," he ordered. "I aim to lock yuh up!"

THIRTY hours later Bill Craig sat on a dirty cot in his jail cell and bitterly contemplated the queer trick fate had played on him. Gradually its deadly seriousness had come

to him. At first he had not been much worried. He had figured things would straighten themselves out. But now he knew he was in a bad mixup.

He could not understand now why he had not quickly and frankly explained what he had seen just before old Gabe Runnels was killed. Perhaps the sudden appearance of the girl had rattled him. And to tell now, he knew, would not help any. It would sound like a lie he had made up to save his own hide.

Craig looked along the jail corridor, at the blur of light in the sheriff's office out in front. Sheriff Jim Nesbit didn't seem like a bad sort. He had admitted that something looked mighty fishy about a saddle-bum knifing an old man he had never seen before, and could not understand why fifteen hundred dollars had disappeared as it had.

"This gent with the sand-paper voice, and his red-haired brother," Bill Craig had said to the sheriff a little while before. "They seemed powerful interested in seein' justice done. What about them?"

"You mean Turk and Todd Raven?" the sheriff had answered. "They own a cow outfit over west apiece. Their spread joins Gabe Runnels' Lazy K. They're a pair of ornery skunks; tight-fisted, quarrelsome, bad. Won't nobody much have anything to do with 'em. Turk Raven is sweet on Ann Runnels, wants her to marry him."

"About this mortgage the Ravens hold against the Runnels spread?" Craig asked softly.

"Gabe Runnels shoulda known better," grunted the sheriff. "The bank wouldn't make him a loan when he needed it a coupla years ago, so he went to the Ravens. Queer, but durin' the last few years, when most cattlemen have had hard sleddin', Turk and Todd Raven have made money. Another way you look at it, mebbe it ain't so queer." Sheriff Nesbit had paused then, as if suddenly aware that he was talking too much. "You seem dang interested in the Ravens, feller. Why?"

But Bill Craig shook his head, and the sheriff had gone away, leaving unanswered questions pounding in the drifter's brain. He kept hearing that sneering, nasal voice; he kept seeing the stricken, bewildered light that had been in Ann Runnels' dark young eyes.

The girl was all alone now. Sheriff Nesbit had said. Her father and mother were both dead. And, the lawman had added pointedly, she stood to lose her ranch—unless that stolen money was recovered.

SUDDENLY Bill Craig tensed, and looked toward the tiny barred window at the back of the cell. The sound he had heard was repeated—a stealthy, scratchy noise.

Curious, the Texan got to his feet, cat-footed across to the window. The window was even with his shoulders; the head of anyone on the ground outside would be below the window. Warily, he paused. And the sound came again, directly under the window.

Craig craned his neck, peered out. And drew in his breath sharply. For, etched sharply in the moonlight, a slim, dark-haired figure stood under the window—Ann Runnels! In the girl's hand was a six-gun. The moonlight splashed over her upturned face as she peered tensely up at the cell window.

Bill Craig saw the gun and thought: "She still thinks I killed her dad—and she's come to gun me through the window!"

Then the girl saw him.

"Where's the sheriff?" she whispered.

"In his office, asleep," Craig murmured. "Why?"

"Do you want to get out of there?" she countered.

"I wouldn't pass up a chance," the Texan said, still wary, watching the

gun. "Listen, Miss, if yuh got ideas about usin' that gun on me—"

"Do you want to get out badly enough to risk your life to pay back the favor?" Ann Runnels insisted swiftly.

"Would takin' that chance help you any?"

"I— Yes, a lot—if it works!"

"Then I reckon I want out that bad," Bill Craig said slowly.

Instantly, the girl thrust the six-gun upward toward the window, butt first. Craig grasped it, pulled it through the bars, queer emotions tugging at him. The girl's tanned young face was close in the shadows as she stood on tiptoe.

"Take the west trail out of town," she whispered swiftly. "Where the trail crosses Coldwater Creek, ride down stream a mile to a big pine tree. I'll be waiting there for you. You'll find a horse out there at the end of the alley. Be careful!"

THEN, she was gone. And Bill Craig stood there, staring at the gun in his hand, a queer triumph rioting through him. A girl thought he had killed her father, yet she was helping him to escape a hang-noose. It didn't make sense.

He was still frowning and puzzled twenty minutes later as he mounted the saddled horse he found in the alley behind the jail and rode unhurriedly out of town.

It had been simple to trick Sheriff Nesbit into the cell. He had left Nesbit bound and gagged on the cell bunk. Sheriff Nesbit had been pretty decent about it. It had not seemed to worry him too much because Bill Craig was escaping. And Craig had bound the sheriff so that the lawman could loosen his bonds in an hour or two.

Craig took the west trail, toward the creek bottoms several miles away. He knew he was doing a foolish thing. He was out of jail, had a horse under him, and the horizon beckoned. Yet he was riding to keep a rendezvous with a dark-eyed girl who had said frankly that the rendezvous held nameless peril for Bill Craig.

He spurred the big dun into a gallop and rode on faster toward the bottoms. A strange impatience rode him. Something stronger than his knowledge of the peril that this range held for him, drew him on.

In all his restless wanderings Bill Craig had never found anything to make him take root in one place. Yet he had his own creed—and that creed did not include letting a couple of skunks run in a cold deck on a slim, dark-eyed girl.

He came to the bottoms, a dark, tangled wilderness of trees and vines; to a narrow, swift-flowing stream. Here he quit the trail and rode downstream through the shadowy thickets. And after awhile he came to a huge pine tree towering on the bank of the stream.

Underneath the pine Ann Runnels waited beside a saddled horse. In the soft shadows as Craig stopped and dismounted, her pale, lovely face looked tired and strained.

"Did you have much trouble?" she asked.

"Not much," said the Texan. "They will have a hard time followin' my trail in the dark." He paused, and when she was silent, he asked: "Why did yuh do it?"

"I told you—because I need your help!"

"That's sorta queer, askin' help of the man yuh think killed yore father and stole the money that was to pay off a mortgaged ranch."

"Don't you think I know you didn't kill my father?" the girl asked fiercely. "I've known from the first."

A quick, warm thrill lanced through Craig. "Then that'll save explanations," he said softly. "Yuh got any idea who did kill him?"

"Yes, I think I have. There are some things I don't understand. About you being in that alley with a knife

in your hand, for instance. But I don't think you killed Daddy. I think it was the Ravens, Turk and Todd."

Craig drew a long breath.

"Then that saves a lot more talk," he said. "Yuh're right—it was the Ravens."

And swiftly, he told the girl what he had seen and heard just before Gabe Runnels was killed the night before.

"I couldn't be mistaken about that scratchy voice," he went on. "I've known all along it was them two that done the killin'. But I don't see how knowin' that is goin' to help either of us. We couldn't prove it. Mebbe, though, it'd be best if I went back and—"

"No," Ann objected quickly. "They wouldn't believe you. They'd just put you back in jail. Then I—I'd have to get you out again."

"Then I'd owe yuh for two favors."

"My motives weren't entirely unselfish in getting you out of jail. Remember, I told you I expected pay for it."

"I'm listenin'," Bill Craig murmured.

"I—you can't understand what this means to me," the girl said, her low voice tense and vibrant. "I hate the Ravens! They're bad. Turk is the worst. For a long time they've wanted our outfit. And Turk wants—me. I haven't let him see how I despise him, because I was afraid for Daddy. That's how I knew it had to be them that killed Daddy and stole the money we got for our cows. With Daddy dead, and the money gone, the ranch would be the same as theirs.

"I love the Lazy K. If I lost it, I wouldn't have any place to go. And I will lose it, unless I can prove who killed my father and recover that mortgage money. I—I didn't have anybody I could go to for help—so I thought maybe, if I helped you get out of jail—"

"Yuh mentioned a plan, back there in town," Craig suggested gently.

"Not much of a plan, just an idea," Ann Runnels said. "And, as I said, it would be dangerous—for you."

Bill Craig looked at the girl, her slim, youthful beauty enhanced by the veins of moonlight seeping through the pine needles, and knew that no danger would be too great to dare if it would bring happiness to her.

"Danger's an old saddlemate of mine," he said. "Let's hear that plan."

Her dark head close to his in the shadows, Ann Runnels talked. . . .

AS a result of what she said, three nights later Bill Craig rode slowly up out of the creek bottoms. A full moon was soaring into the sky as he rode warily across the plain. In the yellow flood of light his face showed gaunt and bearded and hungry. He looked like one of the big killer cats that stalked their prey through the tangled bottoms.

And Bill Craig was hungry. For three days and nights he had lived on berries, and the few fish he could snare from the creek. He had not dared use his gun to kill birds and rabbits, even if he had wanted to, for posses had been prowling the bottoms the first two days looking for him. He had eaten just enough to dull his pangs of hunger, for that was part of the plan he and Ann Runnels had hatched.

It took him an hour to reach the Spade outfit, owned by the Raven brothers, Turk and Todd. The Spade ranchhouse was an old log structure, badly in need of repair. It was dark in the moonlight, except for a sliver of light seeping from one window. That light meant that one or both of the Ravens were at home.

Craig left the dun in a lodgepole thicket a hundred yards from the house, skirted the dilapidated pole corral, went stealthily toward the dark, silent house. Then he was crouched under the window, listening. He could hear a low drone of voices inside. He recognized the nasal,

scratchy voice of Turk Raven; and the purring, catlike tones of the red-haired Todd.

A blanket was over the window. But through a slit in the fabric Bill could peer into the room. Turk and Todd Raven faced each other across a table that held a smoky lamp and a half-empty whiskey bottle. Before Turk Raven was a stack of banknotes. The money, Craig figured, that they had taken from Gabe Runnels. They were arguing, obviously over the division of the money.

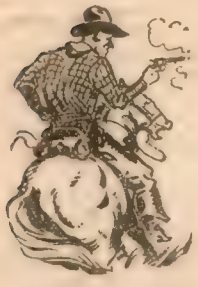
coldly. "Jest stand hooked and mebbe yuh won't get hurt!"

Caught flat-footed, the Ravens froze in their seats, hands hanging over holstered guns. Cruel eyes flared wide with surprise, they stared at Bill Craig's gaunt, sinister figure. They saw the fatigue and hunger in his eyes, saw him sway on legs that seemed about to buckle from weariness.

A quick, meaning glance flashed between the two, and Turk Raven licked his pouting lips.

FIGHTING COURAGE

Here is the spot where Custer stood,
Where Wild Bill Hickok fought;
This is the land where pioneers
A mighty nation wrought!



Their work and blood are in this soil,
Their deeds fill song and story—
Their courage helps us carry on,
Adding to Western glory!

—TEX MUMFORD

Bill Craig backed away from the window, skirted the wall to the narrow porch in front. Gun in hand, he cat-footed across the porch, through the open front doorway and along a dark corridor. He paused before a door that seeped light, his lean, powerful body tense in the shadows.

THEN suddenly he flung his muscular shoulder against the door. The unlocked door crashed inward, propelling the Texan into the room. Quickly he regained his balance, stood braced on wide-spread legs, gun outthrust.

"Easy, gents!" he rapped sharply,

"Yuh sort of took us by surprise, hombre," he said. "What's that gun for?"

"I'll show yuh, damn quick, if yuh move before I tell yuh to," Craig grated. "That's a bunch of money there on the table."

"So that's it!" Todd Raven purred. "A holdup!"

"Jest part of it. I've got a proposition to make you two, and yuh'd better listen."

"What sort of proposition?" Turk asked warily.

"One that'll help us both. I know I'm in a bad fix, but you gents will be too—if I do some talkin'."

"Don't reckon I get yuh."

"You savvy what I mean, all right! Hell, I know it was you two that killed old Gabe Runnels. Yuh stole that money there on the table from him. Mebbe I couldn't prove them things, but I could cause yuh a lot of trouble. Yuh sabe that, don't yuh?"

Like crouched cats the Ravens sat hunched over the table. The dudish Todd was grinning. Turk's boring eyes were pinpoints of inky flame as he stared at the Texan.

"So what yuh want?" Turk grunted.

"This," said Bill Craig. "I need some help. I'm on my last legs. Yuh can see that. I'm nearly dead from hunger and loss of sleep. I couldn't stay out there in bottoms no longer."

"What's that got to do with us?"

"I'm comin' to that," Bill said wearily, swaying unsteadily on his feet. "Here's how the cards lie: I know you two killed old Gabe Runnels and stole his money—but I got the blame for it. I drew the losin' hand, that's all. But I don't figger to lose the whole pot. Like I said, I can cause you two a lot of trouble—or I can keep my mouth shut!"

TURK RAVEN flashed another glance at his brother.

"Sounds fair enough," he said smoothly. "What's yore proposition?"

Pleased surprise lighted Bill Craig's tired face. Obviously he had not expected the two to be so reasonable.

"Why, I need some help to get outa this hang-noose trap," he said. "I need some grub, and a fresh bronc, and mebbe a place to sleep for a few hours. Then I'd ride on out of the country, and never open my mouth about what I know. That way, you two'd be safe, and yuh'd have old Gabe Runnels' outfit to boot."

"Is that all?" Todd Raven asked sneeringly.

"One more thing. I'll need some money, too. I'm takin' the blame for killin' that old goat—looks like I oughta get part of the *dinero* yuh took offa him."

Todd Raven started to say something else, but Turk silenced him with a quick gesture.

"Shore, we'll split that money with yuh," he said grinning. "We'll jest take yuh up on that whole proposition. We'll give yuh the best bronc we got and all the grub yuh need, and we'll take care of yuh till yuh rest up. That way, we all draw winnin' hands. Hell, feller, yuh won't need that gun any more—yuh're among friends. Put it up, and we'll rustle yuh some grub!"

Bill Craig sighed relievedly.

"Mebbe you gents ain't so bad after all," he said. "I could use some grub!"

HE holstered his gun, dropped wearily into a chair.

And then, slowly, his tired body stiffened, and stunned bewilderment seeped into his eyes. The Ravens had lunged to their feet, and guns had leaped suddenly into their hands. Savage, catlike grins were on their dark faces.

Gradual understanding dawned in Craig's eyes.

"So I was loco," he said bitterly. "Yuh lyin', murderin' skunks—"

"Shut up!" Turk Raven snarled, his voice flat with menace. "Yuh poor, crazy fool. Did yuh think we was idjuts enough to do what yuh said? We're not loco enough to give yuh a chance to blab to the law what yuh know about us."

Bill Craig's shoulders drooped dejectedly. "But it ain't right for me to hang for a killin' you two done," he said huskily.

"Don't worry—yuh won't hang," Turk promised, and grinned again. "Shore, we knifed old Gabe Runnels, and stole his money so he couldn't pay off that note. Now we'll get his outfit—and I'll get his girl, if she ain't a plumb dang fool. But you won't be alive to know it, Craig. Yuh come from the creek bottoms, and yuh'll go

back there—but yuh won't know about that either!"

Bill Craig smiled suddenly, and his body relaxed.

"Thanks, Raven," he said softly.

Raven's black eyes narrowed.

"What's that?" he grunted.

"Them last few words are what I've been waitin' for yuh to say ever since I got here," Craig drawled. "I went through three days and nights of torment, jest to hear you say 'em. Yuh know why? Because them words will put a hang-noose about both yore filthy necks!"

Quick alarm and suspicion seethed in the eyes of two killers.

"Meanin' what?" Turk spat. "Talk, blast yuh, or I'll cut yuh in two!"

"Meanin'," Bill Craig said softly, "that yuh've jest done what I couldn't do—convicted yore ownselves of the murder and robbery of old Gabe Runnels. A sheriff's posse is right outside that window, and heard everything yuh said!"

A savage curse ripped from Turk Raven's lips. Flame spewed from his gun-muzzle and licked across the table-top. But Bill Craig had sent his lean body curveting aside. He hit the floor, rolled to his knees, clawing for his gun. He saw flame blossom from Todd Raven's gun, and hot pain slashed at his shoulder. The close-range bullet smashed him to the floor.

He lay there, his body numb, his mind reeling, trying desperately to raise the gun in his hand. He was vaguely aware of blazing, thundering guns, and wondered numbly why he did not feel the burn of lead through his body. Then he saw that the cornered Ravens were not shooting at him. Other figures had swarmed into the room, some coming through the open doorway and others through the shattered window.

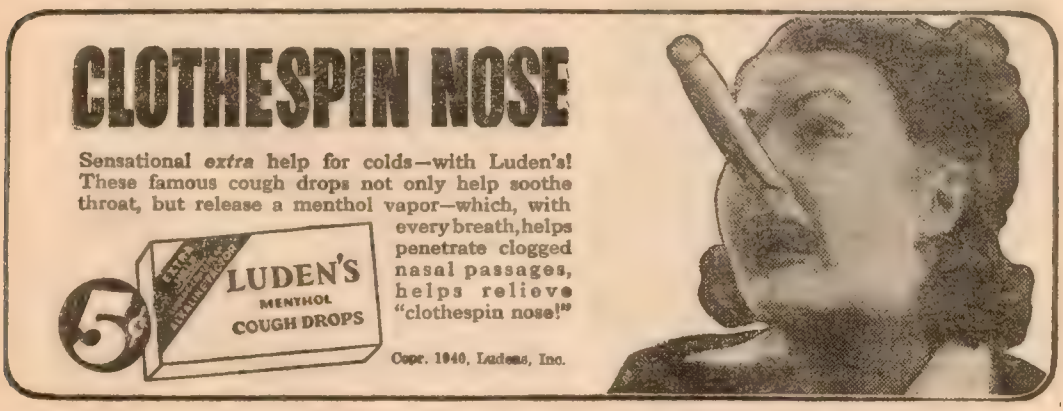
Flanked by grim-eyed deputies, Sheriff Jim Nesbit stood with a blazing gun in his hand.

Bill Craig saw a slim figure come through the doorway. Ann Runnels' dark, anxious eyes found him, and she came toward him.

The gun battle was short, but fierce and deadly. When the gunfire died Turk Raven was dead, and Todd cowered against the wall, wounded and whimpering for mercy. Unasked, he was babbling out a confession that cleared Bill Craig.

But Craig did not hear that confession. For Ann Runnels was by his side. Half crying, she was murmuring something that he could not quite catch as she lifted his head into her arms.

But that did not matter. It was the light in her dark eyes that told Bill Craig his roving days were over for all time.


CLOTHESPIN NOSE
Sensational extra help for colds—with Luden's! These famous cough drops not only help soothe throat, but release a menthol vapor—which, with every breath, helps penetrate clogged nasal passages, helps relieve "clothespin nose!"
5¢
LUDEN'S
MENTHOL
COUGH DROPS
Copr. 1940, Ludens, Inc.

Lannert seethed with anger

Bullet

By C. WILLIAM

Author of "Murder in Cold Canyon,"

CHAPTER I

Yellow

ANY other man would have crawled under that stinging blast of hot words. But Jim Lannert just stood there. His clean, bronzed jaw hard and taut where bunched muscles gathered into a knot, his lips white-edged, thin, flat. His eyes were on the girl standing stiffly before him, her full, red lips curled with scorn, and her taunting words echoed and re-echoed hollowly in his brain.

"You're yellow, Jim Lannert!" the girl facing him accused. "For a while I thought you just didn't know what people thought about you. You knew all the time what they were saying. You're just too yellow to do anything about it. And I believed them when they said your first killing would make you really go bad. You—you haven't the nerve to be bad!"

Jim Lannert just stood there, rocking slightly on wide-spread legs, fists clenching and unclenching at his side. He felt, more than saw, the sneers of the townsmen who had gathered at the sound of the girl's sudden outburst. He tried to clear his mind of the stunned, numb feeling that had gripped his brain at the scornful ring of Marg Woodly's voice.

"But, Marg," he broke out hoarsely. "You don't understand. I don't want to take all that talk Harp Sheldon's men have been spillin' about me. I don't want to start throwin' guns.

A Complete Novelet

Harvest

of Six-Gun Revenge

HARRISON
"Hoss Thief Trouble," etc.

They Called Jim Lannert Yellow —But a Girl's Taunting Voice Made Him See Flaming Red!

They called Dad a killer 'cause he bucked Vince Corby. And once I turn my guns loose every cheap gun-hawk in the country will be after my scalp. It's for you I took all that talk. I've managed to hang on to the ranch, an' I figured you an' me could get married an'—"

Marg Woodly laughed scornfully. Daubs of red rose to her cheeks, sparks of sarcasm flashed in her eyes.

"Marry you?" she said. "Not a man who hasn't the nerve to fight for his own name. Show me you're a man, prove you're not yellow, and I might change my mind."

Jim Lannert seemed to flinch from the sharp sting of her words. The white bands that bracketed his lips faded into the gray that stole over his lean face. He stared at the girl dumbly, head wagging from side to side as if he were unable to believe what he had just heard.

"BUT Marg," he pleaded, "you don't know what yuh're askin'. Once I sling lead, there'll be no turnin' back. You're askin' me—to go bad. That's what it'll amount to, once I've used my guns. Vince Corby owns this country, and he wouldn't give me a

Harp Sheldon accused Lannert of being yellow

chance. It's you an' me, Marg. I'd take over Dad's reputation. I'd be gun bait for every killer—"

The scorn in her eyes knifed through him.

"Yellow." There was a brittleness in her voice that jarred him, shook him. "You're just plain yellow."

She spun around, her split riding skirt flipping in anger as she forced her way through the crowd of staring, pop-eyed men. Jim Lannert's eyes followed her, bitterly conscious of the sneering stares of the townsmen. He knew none of them had ever thought much of him. They hadn't given him a chance. "Flash" Lannert's kid, they had called him. He'd be a killer, once he tasted his first blood.

But now they were thinking different. They were calling him yellow. Not in so many words, but in silent, sneering stares. A sympathetic hand on his arm pulled Jim Lannert's eyes around. "Cuff" Brady, short, stocky, bleak-faced, stood beside him.

"Easy, Jim," Brady muttered softly. "Don't let her stampede yuh. Talk don't hurt nobody, an' things'll cool off after a while."

Jim grinned bitterly. He didn't say anything there wasn't anything to say. Cuff knew what he was thinking, though, and it was Cuff's soft but stern grip that pulled away his hands that had drifted unconsciously to finger the heavy Colts laced low on his lean thighs.

"Yore Dad was my pard, Jim," Cuff went on flatly. "I seen him killed. I spent five years in prison for gunnin' the skunk that cut him down from the back. Vince Corby runs this country, him an' his gunslick, Harp Sheldon. Corby's achin' to get yore land, so don't play into his hands."

A low murmur of taunting laughter ran through the townsmen. Cuff Brady turned woodenly, a cold, half-smile, half-sneer on his lips.

"Prison ain't so bad when yuh get used to it," he drawled icily. "I'd have to go back if I killed any of you. But don't let that make yuh proddy. Make any cracks, an' I'll gunwhip the lot of yuh."

Jim Lannert's lips thinned bitterly. His narrowed eyes swept the townsmen. Their laughter had died out under the threat of Cuff Brady's cold voice, but the sneers still clung to their lips. They were afraid of Brady and his guns, but not of Lannert. They called him yellow.

"It's all right, Cuff," he muttered. "Go on into the store an' pick up them things I bought. We're goin' home."

Brady nodded jerkily, roughly elbowed his way through the mob, and stalked into the store. A swift, strained silence closed in on the street. Now that Brady was no longer there with his guns, the low, taunting whispers quickened among them again.

A TREMBLE of rage surged over Lannert's lanky frame. They were calling him yellow behind those sneering lips. Old Flash Lannert's kid yellow, because he wanted to hang onto his ranch. And for the first time in his young life, Jim Lannert knew it took more nerve to keep his guns in their holsters than to turn them loose.

He paused for a moment, mocking their stares with the bleakness of his eyes. Then he shoved forward, pressing through them toward the horses he and Cuff had left at the hitch-rail in front of the store. The crowd parted before him, as though he were something that had a bad odor. Their whispers rang in his ears.

"Yellow . . . Jim Lannert's yellow . . ."

One man in the departing crowd didn't give way before him. He was big, bulky, with a broad, pock-marked face, and small, catlike eyes. A chill raced down Jim Lannert's spine, then changed to liquid fire as he faced Harp Sheldon.

Sheldon's puffy lips were curled sneeringly, and his hair-matted hands hung close to the jutting handles of

his six-guns. Sheldon's left hand raised, shoved him roughly back a step.

"I ain't movin' out of the way of no polecat," he rumbled harshly. "If yuh want to get past me, Lannert, yuh'll go around."

Hot blood hammered through Jim Lannert's veins, throbbed in his throat and in his temples. Cuff Brady's words rang in his ears. "Easy, Jim. Don't play into their hands." But the tide of his mounting rage smothered Cuff's warning. He tensed, eyes narrow, fingers stiffening clawlike near his guns.

"Harp, you an' yore men have been tryin' to prod me into a fight for a long time now. I don't want no trouble, but there's a limit—"

Sheldon laughed jeeringly, murder flared in his catlike eyes.

"Gettin' yore neck bowed, huh?" he blared. "Don't try to pick a fight with me, Lannert. I know yuh're just yella, an' yore bluff won't work. Just 'cause yore old man was a demon with a gun don't make any difference with me. I'm callin' yuh now, either get out of my way, or start shootin'."

Every muscle in Jim Lannert's body went hard. The numbness that had clung to him since Marg Woodly's stormy outburst drained from him, leaving him ice cold. He saw, without shifting his eyes from Harp Sheldon's beefy face, that Sheldon's fingers were already brushing his guns. He heard the hurried scuffing of boots as the townsmen scuttled furiously to get out of the line of fire. He smiled crookedly.

The evil smile froze on his lips, cold and mocking.

"Sheldon," Lannert drawled slowly, threateningly, "I've always wondered how good a shot you were. Now, I reckon you've got yore chance to show me."

A little of the color drained from Harp Sheldon's beefy face, then flooded back with a rush of dark blood. His big body seemed to draw up, coiling down over his guns for that flashing instant of gun-speed matched against gun-speed. He cursed hoarsely, rasped out harsh, sneering words.

"Ringy, ain't yuh? But yuh're yella. I'm callin' yore bluff, Lannert. Yuh're a low-down, yella—"

HIS hate-filled words ended with the sharp jerk of his hands. Guns cleared leather, blurred upward, shunting off splinters of sunlight. Jim Lannert saw the hammers of Sheldon's guns rocking back, even as his own guns snapped level. But his own thumbs didn't seek out the hammers. He slid forward quickly, as his guns swung up, then chopped the long barrels down savagely on Harp Sheldon's wrists.

A curse of pain roared from the big killer's throat. A shot roared out, spurted a miniature volcano of dust at the tall waddy's feet, then the guns slid from Sheldon's nerveless fingers. He rocked back, his broad face yellow with fear.

For a long instant, Jim Lannert stood there poised on his toes, narrowed eyes bright with deadly lights. Then slowly he let his guns slide back into their holsters. He chuckled bleakly, and his voice came in a soft, cold drone.

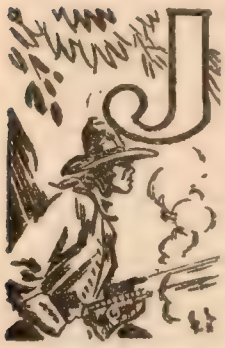
"Sheldon, yuh asked for this. I reckon you'll know what to do the next time we meet. An' if yuh don't want yore pards to see how yella yore blood runs, yuh better make shore we don't meet again. Now pick up yore guns, an' get out of my way."

Fear and dark hatred mingled in Harp Sheldon's muddy eyes. He stooped quickly, scooped his guns, then stepped to one side. Hoarse whispers floated to Jim Lannert's ears as he casually walked away from the scene.

"He's bad! . . . I seen his eyes, an' it was like lookin' into hell.... Jest like his old man. Flash Lannert made over."

CHAPTER II

Stage Holdup



JIM LANNERT grinned bitterly, stepped forward to the horses. For the first time, as he reached the rail, he saw Cuff Brady standing on the porch of the general store. Packages were strewn all over the porch where Brady had dropped them, and the chunky puncher stood in the middle of them, slouching down in a loose crouch. He relaxed as he watched the tall waddy flick the reins of the two horses free. Brady grinned knowingly, stooped to gather up his packages. One of the sacks was split open, and he kicked it viciously to one side.

"Gettin' clumsy in my old age, I reckon," he growled. "Can't even carry a few sacks without droppin' 'em. Wait for me while I get some more beans."

But when Cuff Brady came back out of the store, he was carrying several boxes of shells. Jim Lannert frowned slightly, watched the short waddy stuff the shells into his saddle bag.

"Them the beans yuh went after, Cuff?" he drawled tautly.

Cuff Brady looked up, his pale blue eyes widening in surprise.

"Beans?" he grunted. "I plumb forgot 'em. With all the polecats runnin' loose in this town, all I can think of is bullets. An' now that yuh've unleashed yore guns, I reckon shells are a damn good thing to keep handy—just in case."

Along the narrow, rutty road that wound like a crawling snake across the sage-dotted flats north of the little cowtown, the Spur City stage bounced and rattled, as it made for the first rise of Graybull Ridge. Jim Lannert pulled his grulla bronc to a halt at the crest of the ridge, hipped around in his saddle, narrowed eyes slanting across the boulder-studded slope toward the town. From this height and distance, Spur City was just a splattering of tiny gray buildings sprawling sleepily on the heat-soaked range. The stage, coming rapidly closer to the skirts of the ridge, was half lost in the thick fog of dust that mushroomed upward from clopping hoofs and rolling wheels.

Bitterness stormed inside the tall waddy. And as the white-hot edge of his anger left him, the things Cuff Brady had said during their ride out of town returned to him.

"We gotta take it slow, Jim. Maybe yuh see now what I could've told yuh a long time ago. Marg Woodly was playin' yuh up to this. She's in with Vince Corby, an' if she could rile yuh into goin' proddy, she'd be doin' a good job for her boss, or whatever Corby is to her. Shore, they're together enough, when they know you ain't around, an' I'd bet my socks she's on that stage headin' out to Corby's place right now."

This didn't make sense to Lannert, and yet there had been a steel ring of truth in the puncher's words. Cuff Brady had never been one to talk much, and he must have been seeing things on those long night rides he had taken to back that ugly statement. Things he had kept quiet until his boss could learn the truth for himself.

STILL, a stir of resentment edged the lanky waddy's nerves. His lips flattened in grim, bitter lines. He couldn't believe Marg Woodly would play him like that, doublecross him. Those long rides in the afterglow of sunset must have meant something to her, the plans they had made—the plans he had made. Jim Lannert suddenly realized how little she had joined in with him on those plans. And with the same jarring abruptness he remembered the ugly scorn

that had mocked him back in town, that taunting, sarcastic light that flamed in her eyes. Still, there must be something behind it, she must have some reason—

Cuff Brady's explosive words jarred him back to the present.

"Hell's bells!" he shouted. "Look, Boss! Those men hidin' down there in the rocks."

Jim Lannert's eyes went hard, focusing on the faint outlines of several masked men moving cautiously forward through the boulders that flanked the rutty road halfway up the slope of the ridge. Brady's voice cracked out again, hard-edged, vibrant.

"They're stickin' up that stage, shore's the devil! Look! Some skunk dropped a handkerchief out of the stage window to signal 'em."

Jim Lannert stood up in his stirrups, blue-gray eyes following the handkerchief as it fluttered lazily to the ground. He watched the masked men take their positions in the rocks, guns poised, already following the guard and driver, as the stage drew nearer. He dropped back into the saddle, his hands slapping down to his long-barreled Colts.

"C'mon," he clipped flatly. "We're bustin' up that party."

"Wait, Boss!" Cuff Brady's harsh words halted the tall waddy, even as his spurs dug into his bronc's flanks. "Why should we risk our necks for that stage? It's carryin' Vince Corby's *dinero,* not ours. I heard the driver talkin' to the guard about it. Twenty thousand that Corby's afraid to trust in the Spur City bank. Let them road agents get the money. They're probably those ranchers that got together an' called themselves the 'Hell's Five,' after Corby had 'em outlawed for fightin' to hold onto their spreads. Let Corby worry about his own gold."

Jim Lannert's lips tightened grimly. More than once he had heard about that almost legendary group of men who had banded together to fight Vince Corby. No one knew who they were, but the names of "Bat" Fellows, Eph Sommers, Sandy Deale, and Sam Trenton were those whispered around guardedly.

Then there was the fifth member, the slim, almost boyish rider they called the "Button." Embittered men, all of them, men who had lost their wives, their sons, their land in the raids of Vince Corby's hired gunslicks. And now they were striking back, laughing at rewards Corby posted for their deaths, as they swooped down from the lofty Tortillas to leave behind them stampeded VC herds and burned range and poisoned waterholes.

A warm surge of blood raced through Lannert's veins, as he watched the stage draw nearer to the hidden outlaws. Then swift doubt struck him.

THE Hell's Five had never been known to kill, yet two of those masked bandits were squinting down rifle barrels, following the oncoming driver and stage guard.

Almost simultaneously their rifles barked. Twin puffs of smoke spurted from the guns, then sifted lazily upward. Lannert saw the guard jerk forward in his seat, sway, then topple limply to the ground as the stage bounced to a halt. The reins that had been taut in the driver's hands slid slowly from his nerveless fingers. Even from that distance, Jim Lannert saw the man's head loll around to stare at the body of the guard. Then a stiffness came over the driver. He raised his head slowly, eyes staring toward the gunmen stalking out of the rocks toward the stage.

For an instant he watched them, then white-hot rage flamed through him. He twisted around, snatched up the guard's shotgun, swiveled it around—but he couldn't fire quick enough. The guns of the killers barked first. Lead smashed the driver back into his seat. The shotgun roared under the dying jerk of his fingers, then

he flopped limply to the ground beside the body of the guard.

White-faced, Jim Lannert twisted around to face Cuff Brady. The short puncher's leathery face was ash-gray. There was a hard set to his thinned lips.

"That gang ain't the Hell's Five! That was murder, Boss."

Jim Lannert's spurs bit into the flanks of his horse. He dropped down the rocky slope of the ridge at reckless speed, struck the road a quarter mile above the stage, with Brady riding hard behind him.

A coarse, slope-shouldered hombre saw the two punchers thundering down the road. He yelped a warning, then triggered two quick shots that burned past the tall waddy's cheek. Lannert skidded his bronc to a halt in a shower of flying gravel, struck the ground in a loose crouch. His six-guns seemed to leap into his hands. They swung high and chopped down, jumped, as his thumbs rocked the hammers. The outlaw was smashed backward under the heavy impact of the slugs. He tried to shout, stiffened convulsively, then tumbled to the ground as death closed over him.

A sheet of flame spurted out from the side of the stage, just as the slatty jasper fell. Invisible leaden fingers plucked at Jim Lannert's clothes, burned white-hot furrows across his flesh in a dozen places. He stalked forward in pursuit of his attackers through the smoke of his own guns. Behind him, he heard Cuff Brady's Colt roar out a savage burst, then die out abruptly. A faint groan reached Lannert's ears, then he heard the thud of a falling body.

Cuff Brady was down! Jim Lannert didn't have to look behind him to know. Only lead could keep that short puncher from backing the play of old Flash Lannert's son. A hot tide of rage surged through the tall waddy. Guns that had been silenced for fear of hitting the dimly seen girl inside the stage, leaped to life. His shooting irons hammered, jerked, spitting flame through mushrooming billows of oily black smoke.

A WIZENED, bony killer hunkered down at the wheel of the stage, rocked back under the impact of lead. He reared up to his toes, teetered there off-balance, then slid loosely to the ground in a huddled, lifeless heap.

A hoarse curse ripped from the lips of the outlaw leader crouching at the side of the stage. He was big and broad-shouldered. He looked vaguely familiar to Jim Lannert through the swirling wisps of gunsmoke. Then recognition came to him with a rush. The bandanna hid the outlaw's face, but there was no disguising that hulking body. That man was Harp Sheldon!

Lannert's guns whipped around in that brief instant of recognition. His tense thumbs eased up on dogged-back gun hammers, then locked before the hammers could fall. He peered more closely at that faint movement inside the stage, clearer this time. It was the dim, but unmistakable face of Marg Woodly!

The shock at seeing her there was like having a dose of ice water spilled down his spine. It was true then, all those things Cuff Brady had said. Marg had tried to bait him into an open war with Vince Corby. It was Marg who had signaled for the gang to strike the stage! That single blazing thought registered on Jim Lannert's brain with a crash, even as he felt the numbing blow along the side of his head.

A myriad of roaring, rocketing lights seemed to shatter his brain. He shook his head stubbornly, and for a fleeting instant his vision cleared. Dimly, he saw Marg Woodly fight her way out of the stage. Her shrill scream that seemed touched with fear and horror echoed across his brain.

Harp Sheldon was lumbering forward.

"Got yuh!" he sneered. "An' yuh was goin' to punch my ticket the next time we met!"

Then the giant outlaw seemed to fade before Jim Lannert's eyes, change to an ominous black cloud that rolled forward to swallow him. . . .

CHAPTER III

Murder Frame

THE low rumble of men's voices dragged Jim Lannert back to consciousness. He stirred, became aware of the bite of gravel into his back. A heavy boot gouged into his ribs. Someone cackled in fiendish delight. His eyes fluttered open slowly. He blinked many times to clear away the white mist that seemed to swirl before him.

Gradually, his vision cleared. Sheriff Ben Hardy was bending over him, his square face grim and hard. He saw Harp Sheldon just behind the lawman, his thick lips sneering, an ugly light in his eyes. Near Sheldon stood Kin Wade, his pinched face bleak, expressionless; "Hop" Callon, grinning like a devil; "Tub" Waller, watching him with eyes of ice. Remembrance flooded over the tall waddy. He shoved weakly to his elbows, then flopped back to the ground, as Sheriff Hardy's open hand rammed against his chest.

"Just lay still, Lannert," came the lawman's hard-edged words. "You've done yore day's work, an' I'm goin' to see yuh get yore pay. You'll swing for that job, killer."

Jim Lannert's eyes flared.

"Killer?" he choked, dazed. "Hardy, yuh're loco. I didn't murder that driver or guard. I tried to save 'em. Sheldon here, an' his skunky pards—"

The sheriff's harsh-toned words cut him short.

"Lyin' won't get yuh out of this mess, Lannert. Sheldon told how he run onto you an' Cuff Brady stickin' up the stage. You an' Brady murdered that guard an' driver, an' yuh killed 'Slats' Mickle an' Joe Wade when Sheldon and his boys rode up. Yuh'll swing sky high for that job, Lannert, an' so'll Brady when we catch him. Marg Woodly was in that stage, an' she's backin' Sheldon's word all the way."

Jim Lannert's dazed eyes shifted from the lawman's grim face. He saw Marg Woodly, pale, shaken, standing a few feet away. His eyes searched her face, read something that sent a wave of bitterness churning through him. He knew her answer even before he choked out those hoarse words.

"Marg," he pleaded, "set this thick-headed galoot straight. You saw me an' Cuff bust down on Sheldon an' his killers. You saw—"

He saw the girl's lips tighten. A faint flush of color rose in her cheeks, seemed to shadow something deep in her eyes.

"I—I saw just what Harp Sheldon said," she clipped stiffly. "I won't lie for you, Jim. Everything Sheldon says is true."

The moments that followed Marg Woodly's damning words were vague in Jim Lannert's mind. Only dimly did he realize that they had dragged him down the street, and had locked him in the little jail. He lay there on the cot, staring dully up at the ceiling. Outside a mob had gathered, milling back and forth, growling lynch talk that was fired by Vince Corby's men until Sheriff Hardy forced them to scatter. After that a smothering blanket of silence closed in.

GRADUALLY the numbness left his brain, and was replaced by cold, deadly fury. He jumped to his feet, stalked across the room, tried the bars in the single window savagely. But the bars were set deep in the

'dobe walls, and he gave it up as a hopeless task.

The western sky was streaked with bands of purple and red, marking the coming of night, but he didn't see them. Marg Woodly's small round face, with her tight, accusing lips, still clung to his mind. She had sold him out. She had planned this. She had killed Cuff Brady, not with bullets, but with those same plans that had framed him for murder.

A sudden thought struck him. Harp Sheldon had robbed the stage carrying Vince Corby's gold. Was Sheldon doublecrossing his boss? His jaw hardened grimly as another thought came to him. Vince Corby didn't stand to lose anything in the robbery, with his money covered by insurance. It was a skunky job, for which Jim Lannert would take all the blame.

Harp Sheldon hadn't brought Brady's body to town with him, so they planned it to look like Brady had gotten away with the money Sheldon had taken himself. It was so simple, and Jim Lannert had played right into their hands.

The whole plot crystallized cold and grim in the tall waddy's mind. It was clear now, where before it had been only a few vague thoughts haunting his mind. And Marg Woodly had baited him into this!

Darkness had closed in on the town. Down the street the Nugget Saloon was beginning to show signs of life, as hard-faced punchers and townsmen drifted through its batwing doors. There was something ominous in the sounds that floated from the saloon. The piano was silent. There was no dancing, nothing but the low, grumbling undertone that permeated the night air with tenseness.

Jim Lannert knew the signs, and his narrowed eyes went cold. Corby's men were there, buying the drinks, firing the mob with lynch talk. That was the way Corby would work it, Lannert told himself bitterly. But just before the lynch pack dragged him out of the jail, Corby would come to offer him his freedom as the price for his ranch. The chill of ice frosted Jim Lannert's eyes. Corby would come soon, and when he did—

A faint movement in the darkness at the side of the jail caught the tall waddy's attention. He stiffened, suddenly grew taut all over, as he watched the dark shadow move closer to the window. It was a man. He could see the jasper more clearly now, the slender figure of a man dressed in solid black.

The figure crept closer, pausing now and then to glance cautiously around him, then slid forward again until he was directly under Lannert's cell window.

"Lannert?"

The low, tense words were whispered through the window. Jim Lannert leaned forward, senses alert for a murder trap.

"Yeah?" he asked softly.

THE outline of the man's head and shoulders raised slowly into the rectangle of the window frame. He couldn't make out the man's face, shadowed as it was by the broad brim of his black felt hat, but he was young, very young. Lannert heard the low words again, hurried and tense.

"Corby's coming. He'll try to get yuh to sign over yore ranch to him. Don't sign. Either way, he'll slip yuh a key to the cell. Sheldon's men will be waiting outside. Corby'll give yuh a gun loaded with blanks. Use these shells. Hell's Five will be here to help yuh bust out."

A slender hand shoved a small package between the bars of the window. Lannert took the package greedily, felt his fingers brush a soft, boyish hand that pulled quickly away at his touch.

Lannert leaned forward, pressing his face to the bars.

"Wait a minute," he rasped tensely. "Who are you? How do I know this ain't another trap?"

But the figure had already slipped quietly back into the shadows. Lannert waited a minute, his mind racing, groping over the youth's words. The gent had said Hell's Five would help him bust out. That was it! This slender youth was the member they called the "Button." But how did the Button know all this about Vince Corby's plans?

He gave up trying to answer the questions that flashed across his mind. He ripped the package open, a dozen or so .45 slugs tumbled into the palm of his hand. He rolled them absently in the cup of his hand, then shoved them into his pocket, eyes grim and purposeful. Whatever the kid's purpose was, these shells weren't duds.

The minutes dragged by, and the rumble that floated up the street from the saloon mounted into a sullen growling roar. Then another sound came to his ears, the creak of the jail door being opened. He twisted around, face taut, lips thinned into a tight, white-edged line.

He stepped back from the window, crossed the floor to the cell door. In the sheriff's office, he watched a shadow creep along the wall. It came silently toward him.

A faint smile curled at the corners of his lips as he recognized Vince Corby. Corby was tall, darkly handsome, his eyes muddy, fathomless. His lips were thin, bloodless, set in a wide oily smile as he halted in front of the cell door. His words came in a soft, mocking voice.

"Figured maybe we could talk business quietlike while the sheriff is out," he drawled. "Funny why an old coot like him that's toted a star for twenty years would risk his neck to cool off a lynch mob."

Not a hint of the storm of hot rage that gripped Jim Lannert showed on his placid face.

"Corby, yore men are stirrin' up that mob," he bit out. "Yuh didn't come here just to worry about my health. What do yuh want?"

Corby's smile broadened.

"Yore ranch," he droned. "I've been after it for years, an' I shore aim to get it now. Yuh're on a spot, Lannert. If that lynch pack don't get yuh, a jury'll convict yuh shore as shootin'. Yuh'll need five thousand dollars to get a lawyer to handle yore case. That's what I'm offerin' for yore spread."

A SARCASTIC smile stole across Jim Lannert's lips. His eyes went cold and bleak as he stared hard at Vince Corby. Both of his hands shot out to clutch at the bars of the cell door, his knuckles draining white under his grip.

"My ranch is worth twenty thousand, an' you know it," he grated harshly. "Shore, this is yore frame, an' yuh think yuh got me over a barrel. Yuh're tryin' to take my spread just like yuh took every other small rancher around here. Tom Swane got killed accidentally when some of yore steers stampeded an' run him down.

"His widow needed money, an' yuh took the ranch off her hands—at eighty percent profit. Same with Bat Fellows, Eph Sommers, Sandy Deale, and the rest. They had to take yore offer, or lose everything when yuh put the squeeze on 'em. Nobody else around here had the money to see 'em through.

"But they ain't through yet, Corby. Yuh're backin' the Hell's Five now, an' there's been a lot of talk that the Cattlemen's Protective Association is backin' them. Dad died tryin' to hold our ranch, an' I'll hang before I sign it over to you."

Under that passionate outburst of hot words, Vince Corby's oily face went ash gray for an instant. Then a dark tide of blood mounted into his cheeks. His eyelids crawled down over his muddy eyes that were red with the glint of murder lust. His right hand slid to the Colt buckled around his waist, pulled away with an effort. He laughed harshly.

"They may hang yuh anyway," he sneered. "That lynch talk ain't goin' to die down so easy at the Nugget. You better think again. If you hang, I'll get the spread anyhow when the county sells it for the taxes."

"It'll cost yuh a danged sight more than five thousand then," Lannert snapped coldly. "Corby, yuh're wastin' yore time."

Vince Corby forced the sneer off his lips, smiled thinly.

"I figured on that," he drawled. "You Lannerts always were stubborn gents. Well, that's yore bad luck."

CHAPTER IV

Jailbreak

HE STARTED to turn away, hesitated, then faced Lannert again.

"Maybe I'm loco to do this, but I can't quite figure you stickin' up that stage. Whatever talk you've been spillin' about me, I'm givin' you a chance. That lynch mob will be bustin' loose, an' if yuh're still here when they come to get yuh, it's yore own fault. The sheriff left this key on his desk, an' here's a gun yuh'll be needin'. You can make yore own break."

Corby pulled a gun from his coat, slipped it through the bars, then passed a key to him. Lannert took them, his lean face blank, then watched the rancher turn and stalk out of the jail.

A crooked grin played on Jim Lannert's lips. It was panning out exactly the way the Button had said it would. He shoved his arm through the bars, fitted the key into the lock, twisted it. The door swung open at his push, but he quickly pulled it shut again. He stepped back deep into the shadows of the room, flipped the gun open, and spilled the shells into his hand. He twisted the lead of one of the shells, felt it jerk loose from the brass casing. It was empty, as Lannert knew it would be. The powder had been removed.

He chuckled to himself, began thumbing in the shells the Button had given him. Maybe there was a gun trap waiting outside for him, but there would be lead flying both ways now.

As he shoved through the cell door, an angry roar rolled down the street from the direction of the Nugget. He jerked to a halt, eyes flaring. His right hand, gripped hard around the butt of the Colt, seemed suddenly moist, sweaty.

He didn't have to guess the meaning of that roar. The lynch mob had broken away from the sheriff, was storming down the street. If he went outside now, Harp Sheldon's hidden killers would blast him. If he waited another instant, he could never escape that rope-hungry pack.

His jaw was hard, tense with expectancy, as he pressed forward into the sheriff's office. Inside the room, he stiffened, his eyes darting to the tall, evil-looking gunman crouching behind the jail's front door. There was a gun in Kin Wade's bony hand. His pinched face was twisted by a sneering grin.

"Keep comin', Lannert," he snarled. "Yuh're bustin' out of here whether yuh want to or not. We figured on waitin' for yuh, but that mob got started too soon. An' we ain't takin' any chances on yuh changin' the minds of them gents that's got rope-fever. You know too much, an' it ain't good for yore health."

A faint shiver rippled down Jim Lannert's lanky frame. He wanted to jerk up his gun, smash slugs into that sneering killer, but he knew that that would only bring the rest of the gang down on him before he could get away. A wild idea flared in his brain. He moved forward, rising stiffly to the balls of his feet, as he neared the gunslick. As he passed by the sheriff's

desk, he threw his hip out. The desk lurched under the shock of his body; the lamp skidded from the edge, tottered, then crashed to the floor. The room was bathed in black.

KIN WADE cursed hoarsely, snapped his gun down in a savage, chopping shot. Jim Lannert threw himself wildly to one side. The slug smashed harmlessly into the desk. He dropped to the floor, rolled toward the wall, then lurched to his knees. Roaring, stabbing tongues of flame speared through the darkness from where the killer crouched. Then Wade's gun clicked empty.

"Get him, Boss!" his thin-edged voice ripped out. "The damn fool is comin' out!"

Lannert lunged forward, both hands groping out before him. He touched Wade's bony shoulder, gripped it with his left hand, spun the gunman around. His right hand shot out, found the partly opened door, jerked it back.

A whimper of fear burst from Kin Wade's lips, as Lannert shoved him into the doorway. He tried to scream, but his voice was choked off by the boot that rammed into the small of his back, kicking him out into the open.

Outside, an instant of strained silence fell over the thick darkness, then split to the shrill yelp of a man.

"There he is, Boss! Near the door!"

Other flames lashed out from the corner of the jail. Kin Wade's skinny body seemed to bounce under the impact of smashing slugs. He stumbled across the plank walk into the hitch-rail, started to slip to the ground, spun convulsively, then flopped loosely over the rail.

Crouching just inside the jail door, Jim Lannert grinned coldly. Down the street the lynch pack snapped out of their stupor, sobered by the sudden burst of shots. They broke into a run toward the jail, boots thudding on the hard-packed ground. Lannert waited until they crowded past the jail to Kin Wade's body, then slipped silently out the door, and pressed around the opposite corner of the jail.

Harp Sheldon's throaty voice floated to his ears, as he broke into a fast run down the lane that bored through the gloomy maw between the jail and the courthouse.

"Me an' the boys jest happened by when the dirty killer busted out. Someone must've slipped him a key. Somebody light a match, so's we can see."

At the rear of the jail, Jim Lannert angled off until he was parelleling the street. He chuckled mirthlessly as Sheldon's voice jarred across the night air again, hoarse and throbbing with rage.

"It's Kin Wade! Damn it, get movin', yuh gawkin' galoots. That dirty skunk crossed us!"

The night seemed suddenly stagnant and tainted with danger after Harp Sheldon's hoarse, cursing words. Townsmen who had been fired into lynch fever by Corby's talk and Corby's liquor were quickly sobered by the shots that no longer meant just a jail break, but the backfiring of a sinister murder trap. They hesitated as Sheldon roared out orders, then slowly drifted back from the gunmen who ringed in the VC ramrod.

HARP SHELDON'S voice raised in hoarse fury.

"Stare, blast yuh! The Hell's Five have filled yuh with a lot of proddy ideas about Vince Corby, but them owlhooters will do the rest of their high-ridin' at the end of a rope. I don't give a hoot what yuh're thinkin'. C'mon, Hop, Tub, Pecos. That killer got away, an' we're roundin' him up."

Jim Lannert slowed his pace as he neared the Double O corral at the edge of town. It was from this direction that the Button had come, and it was here that he hoped to run into the rest of the Hell's Five. An uneasiness gripped his soul as the echoes of Sheldon's voice pierced his ears. Sheldon

had promised that the Hell's Five were due to hang!

He came to a sudden halt at the rails that fanned out behind the little corral office. Years before, the corral had been abandoned when the shipping pens were built closer to the railroad siding. Months of sun and wind and driving rain had battered the little shack, sagging its roof, and leaving holes where the windows had once been. Only the faint sigh of the night wind through the sage and tumbleweed reached Lannert's keenly attuned ears. He knew Harp Sheldon's killers were spreading out behind him, combing the town with deadly purpose. Once they caught him it would end in a bullet showdown. With him dead nothing could be proved against them or Vince Corby, but with him alive— But he wouldn't be alive long.

The thought brought a bleak, bitter set to his thinned lips. Marg Woodly had fixed that. He couldn't dodge that killer pack for long, and the law would exonerate any one of them who shot him in the back. He suddenly realized that breaking jail had only added to the charges built up against *him. If he had stayed in jail—*

Lannert's mind raced as he stood there beside the corral. He shifted into movement, groping his way around the rails toward the shack. He jerked to a sudden halt before he had gone five yards. He heard the restless sound of a horse champing at its bit. He leaned forward tensely, staring at the dim outlines of several horses inside the dark corral. He bent low, scissored his long legs over the bottom rail and pressed toward the horses. There were five of them, four blacks like the Hell's Five rode, and a blaze-faced mare. Cuff Brady's horse!

Fire blazed in Jim Lannert's veins. The last time he had seen that mare was when he and Brady had ridden down the ridge toward the stage. A glow of hope leaped through him. Maybe Brady hadn't been killed. Maybe—

Then another sound pulled him around. It came from inside the shack, a low, muffled groan. He pressed forward, lean face taut, gun leveled.

The rear door of the shack sagged drunkenly on one hinge. He paused before it, narrowed eyes probing the thick darkness inside. The moaning sound came again.

He slid forward into the building, then froze, as his foot struck something soft and giving. Something that moved! His gun snapped down, thumb rocking back the hammer.

"Who are yuh?"

His tense words floated hollowly through the darkness. A muffled groan answered him. It sounded full of pain and terror. Lannert faded out of the dim light of the door, slipped his hand into his pocket, pulled out a match. He scuffed the match into flame, dropped it instantly, and slid to one side of the flaring light.

WHAT he saw in that fleeting glow of flame brought a hoarse gasp of surprise to his lips. There were men lying on the floor of the shack, four or five of them, bound and *gagged. And one of them was Brady!*

He slid his gun back into its holster, jerked out his knife and bent beside the nearest man. He felt for the ropes, sliced the blade through them, then moved on to the next man.

Low, strained curses jarred his ears as the men freed themselves. Cuff Brady's voice came like the grate of steel on stone.

"Jim, is that you? Dammit, I thought yuh was dead. We came here to help yuh bust out, but Sheldon's gunslicks jumped us. Damn it, that shootin'—"

Lannert chuckled softly.

"They got me mixed up with Kin Wade, an' his health went bad fast. I thought yuh was killed when them dirty skunks gunned us at the stage. You was right about Marg. She played me for a fool an' crossed us. She was in on the whole set-up."

Cuff Brady cursed vehemently, damning everyone and everything.

"I was wrong about her, Jim, dead wrong. An' so are you. I don't know what game she's playin', but if it hadn't been for her, I'd be buzzard bait now. She helped me get away while Sheldon was bustin' open the strong box. Didn't say nothin', but I'm bettin' my pants she's straight."

It seemed to Jim Lannert that he had gone hot and cold at once. The bitterness that had gnawed at him abruptly gave way to something that left him numb, stunned. He didn't know what to think; he couldn't think. He stood there swaying slightly on wide-spread feet. He relived Marg Woodly's taunting, scornful words

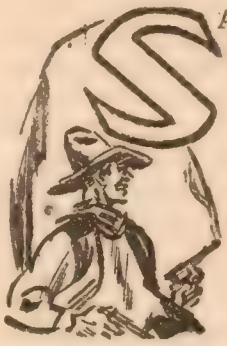
ringing in his ears, seeing the white handkerchief flutter to the ground from the stage in signal to Harp Sheldon's hidden killers, remembering the things Cuff Brady had said about Marg slipping out of town to meet Vince Corby.

"We can't stay here all night," Cuff Brady spat out. "The whole town will be down on our necks any minute."

The grim words jarred Jim Lannert back to reality. He looked around, saw Bat Fellows standing near him. Age and bitterness had ridden hard on Fellows since Vince Corby had taken over his ranch a year ago. He had lost his wife when a gang of night-riders had swooped down to burn his home. There was something harsh and ugly in his gaunt, leathery face now, intensified by the black clothes that stamped him as one of Hell's Five.

CHAPTER V

Six-Gun Showdown



SAM TRENTON, short, fat, pale-eyed, fidgeted restlessly near the sagging rear door of the shack. Sandy Deale was cursing monotonously as he tenderly rubbed rope-chafed wrists. Eph Sommers, tall, bony, stoop-shouldered Kentuckian, looked like an evil statue standing near Fellows.

"Not the whole town," Lannert growled softly. "Sheldon's men an' Corby will be lookin' for us, shore, but the town balked. Since the Hell's Five started ridin', they've been figurin' maybe Corby was behind the murders an' range burnin' that made yuh lose yore spreads. They was honin' to lynch me, but that was personal. Reckon they ain't shore I'm guilty, after Sheldon blowed up when he saw he'd killed his own man instead of me."

Sam Trenton's cold voice boomed from the doorway.

"They're comin', boys! Must be a dozen of 'em. Dammit, if I only had a gun!"

Jim Lannert's lean jaw snapped hard.

"We'll make for the jail," he bit out. "We got to hole up some place, an' there's plenty of guns there. You go first. I'll keep them skunks busy for a while."

Grim and cold-eyed, they stumbled through the little shack to the front door, then burst out to the street, broke into a quick run toward the jail. Jim Lannert followed behind them, gun in hand, eyes fixed on the dim outlines of the killers coming up at the rear of the corral.

They hadn't gone half a dozen yards when Harp Sheldon's bull voice roared out.

"There they go! The Hell's Five are loose. Earn yore pay, blast yuh! We're finished if they get away."

Roaring pencils of gun-flame lashed out from the killer pack. Sandy Deale cursed, stumbled, caught himself, continued on, gripping a bullet torn shoulder.

Jim Lannert slowed his pace. His gun chopped down and jumped in his hand. His nostrils were filled with the acrid scent of burned powder. A man's shrill scream split the blasting echoes of gun-thunder. For an instant the killers held their ground, matching lead for lead, then suddenly broke under the deadly hail of lead that whined around them.

Lannert raced forward as his Colt clicked empty. He reached the jail as the Hell's Five spilled drunkenly inside. He leaped through the doorway, kicked the door shut behind him, just as Sheldon's gunnies stormed down the street behind him. He dropped the bar over the door, whirled to see Sheriff Ben Hardy coming toward him, his square face grim and hard.

"Damn glad you an' these Hell's Five hombres came back, Lannert. Corby batted me over the head an' swiped my jail keys. I seen him as I fell, an' when I came to I could see a lot of things I didn't see before. They wanted you dead so's yuh couldn't prove that Sheldon an' that Woodly girl were liars. There's goin' to be hell to pay from now on."

THE Hell's Five ran to the rifle rack in the corner of the room, spun back to the barred windows. Cuff Brady found a brace of Colts in the sheriff's desk. He grinned like a devil as he took his place beneath one of the windows.

A moment of tense silence fell over the waiting men. Jim Lannert punched the empty shells from his gun, refilled the chambers. Sam Trenton's cold voice sang out, breaking the tension.

"Here they come! By hell, I've been waitin' plenty patient a whole year for this!"

Outside, thundering sheets of lead roared from outlaw guns. Their heavy boots thudded as the pack rushed the jail.

Jim Lannert's gun went hot in his hands. From the corner of his eyes, he saw the hellish glow that lit Bat Fellows' face. Fellows had an old score to settle and he was balancing the books with lead. Eph Sommers' bony face was chiseled granite as he squinted down the sights of his rifle. He might have been shooting squirrels in Kentucky for all the emotion he showed, but his gun was a living, blasting thing of death.

A sheet of blood curtained down Sam Trenton's round face below a ragged wound. His jaw was like iron and his eyes were like ice. Sandy Deale, already wounded once, emptied his rifle, then ducked low and methodically began refilling it.

Halfway across the street Harp Sheldon's killers faltered under that screaming hail of lead. They spun, darted back to the cover of the buildings across the street. Vince Corby's harsh-toned voice rose above the din of the battle.

"Take cover! We can't bust 'em out, but, by hell, we can starve 'em out."

Jim Lannert whirled, shot out the revealing light of the lamp that Sheriff Hardy had brought to replace the one that was broken. It would be a waiting game from now on. Corby would starve them out, if he had to. He'd murder the sheriff and claim the Hell's Five had done it. And with the Hell's Five and Jim Lannert outlawed, Corby would be cleared of their deaths.

Lannert calmly reloaded his gun, then peered cautiously through the barred window. Three of Corby's men lay dead, sprawled in the middle of the street. The rest had taken to cover behind water barrels and the

corners of the buildings across the street.

Abruptly Bat Fellows' gruff voice choked out.

"Hell, here comes the Button! The idiot's tryin' to get to us!"

Cuff Brady cursed.

"He'll never make it. They'll gun him down shore."

Jim Lannert pressed his face to the bars, saw the slender, black-garbed figure moving silently down the line of buildings toward the jail. Bat Fellows spun him around, gripped his shoulders hard.

"Yuh've got to do something, Lannert. The Button ain't a man. It's the daughter of John Benton, the C.P.A. detective who's backin' the Hell's Five. Benton was murdered by Corby's men before he ever got here, an' his daughter took his job over. She's yore girl, Lannert — Marg Woodly!"

IT WAS as if an invisible fist had smashed Jim Lannert between his eyes. He rocked back on his heels, his lean face turning ash gray. He felt cold and numb all over. Marg Woodly was blindly walking into a death trap. The thought seemed to bounce between the walls of his brain. The Button was going to die. Marg Woodly was going to die.

The coldness that gripped him exploded abruptly into savage, white-hot anger. He raced across the room, grabbed a sawed-off shotgun resting against the sheriff's desk, spun back to the door. Bat Fellows' gaunt form was beside him, clipping out harsh, broken words.

"Jim, what d'yuh aim to do?"

Lannert glared wildly at the rancher.

"Do?" he rasped. He laughed gratingly. "I'm goin' out there. I'm goin' to blow Vince Corby an' his skunk pack plumb to hell. I'm goin' to—"

He cursed, lurched to the door, kicked the bar back. Behind him, Cuff Brady's cold words came to his ears.

"Too danged stuffy in here. Probably smells to high heaven of polecats outside, but I'm goin' out an' do some fumigatin'."

Lannert threw the door open. He pressed through, slid to one side along the jail wall. The outlaws across the street hadn't seen that slim, boyish figure creeping toward the jail yet, but they saw Lannert. Lead roared out from the corner of a building, slapped into the wall near his head. Harp Sheldon's bull voice boomed.

"They're comin' out! Let 'em have it, boys! By hell, there's another one of 'em comin' down the street!"

Jim Lannert sped forward in a low, crouching run. The girl wasn't more than a dozen yards away, and he made nearly half that distance in a wild, headlong dive. His shoulder smashed into her knees. She screamed, went down under the impact. A hail of lead ripped through the air around them. Lannert struck the ground, rolled over. He lurched to his knees, his lips thin and flat and hard. The six-gun in his hand jumped, spat lead. The killer pack came into the open now, leaping from behind cover to face the men spilling out of the little jail.

WHAT happened during that gun-shattered instant was never clear in Jim Lannert's mind. He knew he was running forward, knew that two of the outlaws had fallen under the slugs that had hammered from his Colt. There were men standing. There were men falling lifeless to the ground, still clutching their smoking guns. Sandy Deale went down. Sam Trenton crouched over his partner's body, his round face a bloody mask as he thrust shells into the gun that was scorching his hands.

Cuff Brady fought like a devil. His wild yells rolled the length of the street as he bored in toward the Corby killers. He went down, got up triggering his guns, then went down again. He didn't get up.

Suddenly, shocked, Jim Lannert realized that he had been smashed back-

ward to the ground. He got up, numbly conscious that his left shoulder had gone dead and that hot, liquid fire was streaming down his chest. Dimly, he saw Harp Sheldon and Vince Corby in the smoke-fogged darkness. There were others of the Corby gun crew still on their feet, but he didn't see them. He couldn't see anything but Sheldon and Corby.

Sheldon was sneering. Corby was grinning at the sight. He didn't grin after Lannert triggered the first barrel of that stub-barreled shotgun. He was literally lifted from his feet by the blasting charge of buckshot, hammered back into the black maw of the night. Lannert felt the shotgun kick in his hands again. He didn't know whether he hit Harp Sheldon or not, but he heard a man's hoarse scream that seemed muffled by distance.

Jim Lannert was vaguely conscious that someone had dropped a blanket over him. He couldn't see clearly any more. The pain in his chest hampered his breathing. He tried to call to Marg, but he couldn't make himself heard over the din that roared in his ears. He soon sank into a pit of black where soft voices whispered at him and rough hands carried him through a swirling seat of nothing. . . .

It had been night but now it was day. There was a window in back of his head when his eyes fluttered open, and tiny motes skidded down a shaft of sunlight. It seemed that the voice he heard had been talking to him for days, but he was just now beginning to understand the low words. It was Marg Woodly's voice—Marg Benton, as Bat Fellows had said.

"You've got to get well, Jim," he heard her say. Her voice was soft, soothing to his ears. "I didn't mean those things I said. But I had to do something to start you fighting. I know you took those things because of me—because of us, but we had to use you to get Vince Corby out in the open. I let them think I was working with them. I signalled for that stage holdup, but I didn't think it would end in murder. I wanted you framed for it because I knew Corby would have to kill you or have to show his hand."

Her hair was like burnished gold. Funny, Jim Lannert thought, he had never seen it like that before. He guessed it was because he had never looked at the sun through it before. Or maybe her hair had captured part of the sun. He didn't know. After all a cow waddy can't know everything.

Next Issue: Action-Packed Western Novelets and Stories by
TOM GUNN, FRANK CARL YOUNG,
MOJAVE LLOYD *and Other Favorite Writers*

ROMEOS

Don't let your love-making be spoiled by a cough due to a cold . . . Keep Smith Brothers' Cough Drops handy. Black or Menthol, just 5¢.

Smith Bros. Cough Drops are the only drops containing VITAMIN A

Vitamin A (Carotene) raises the resistance of mucous membranes of nose and throat to cold infections, when lack of resistance is due to Vitamin A deficiency.

Dawson's gun blasted lead

Six-Gun Cleanup

By SAM BRANT

Author of "Blotted Brands," "Bullet Welcome," etc.

Tom Dawson Rips the Mask off Murder as Six-Guns Roar!

TOM DAWSON stepped out of the Cattlemen's Bank in Bitter Springs with a dazed expression on his lean young face. He clutched a saddle bag in his left hand tightly and headed for the hitching rail where his horse stood basking in the hot sunlight.

"Two thousand dollars," muttered Dawson. "And old Bates Jefferson loaned it to me straight off without battin' an eye."

He couldn't understand it. The man who controlled the Cattlemen's Bank did not have a reputation for generosity. Far from it. Most people in the vicinity of Bitter Springs denounced Bates Jefferson as a ruthless skinflint. They said he was happier foreclosing a mortgage than he would have been playing Santa Claus at Christmas time. Yet Jefferson had loaned Dawson two thousand dollars willingly, taking a note due in six months, plus a mortgage on Dawson's little spread as collateral.

"Jefferson don't know it," murmured Dawson as he swung into the saddle of his pinto, "but his loanin' me that money shore fixed things up fine for Molly Martin."

The pinto jumped skittishly as a bright light caught its right eye. Dawson saw the dancing beam flash up and down the hot, dusty street. He realized it was reflected from something but could not discover where it came from along the single street of the little cowtown.

Up at the north end of town a broad-shouldered, heavy-faced man stepped languidly out of the Elk Horn Saloon. He yawned, wiped his lips with the blue neckerchief hanging loosely around his throat, then mounted a bay horse and rode out of town. Down at the south end of the street a wiry-looking little waddy came hurrying out of Long's Feed Store, flung himself into the saddle and galloped away in a cloud of dust.

"Matt Lake and Steve Hardy," muttered Tom Dawson as he headed his horse toward the north end of the town. "Don't know about Lake but Hardy acts like he's got something on his mind, the way he hightailed it out of town."

Both men, Dawson knew, were ruthless gunslicks, hanging around town without any visible means of support, yet usually turning up nightly in the saloon with plenty of money on them.

The important thing to Dawson was that *he* now had enough money to lend to Molly Martin. Her mortgage was due on her little spread tomorrow and Jefferson had insisted that the fifteen hundred dollars she owed him be paid in full or he would be forced to foreclose on the ranch.

In his eagerness to tell the girl the good news Dawson urged his pinto into a gallop as he left the town behind him. The horse raced through the stretch of rugged range country that was between Bitter Springs and the Double M and Lazy D spreads.

AHEAD, a slender auburn-haired girl on a roan appeared on the top of a rise. Even though she was some distance away, Dawson recognized Molly. She waved to him, then suddenly wheeled her horse and disappeared in the direction from which she had come.

"Now what made her do that?" murmured Dawson in a puzzled voice. "I had some good news for her. Reckon—"

He broke off abruptly, grabbing for his gun. Two bandanna-masked horsemen had suddenly loomed into view from behind a huge rock at the side of the trail. Sunlight glittered on the long blue barrels of the Colts they held in their hands, and both six-guns were aimed directly at Dawson.

"Reach sky!" shouted the larger of the masked men. "Take yore hand away from yore gun."

Tom Dawson reluctantly reined his pinto to a halt and lifted his hands above his head. The two masked men rode closer. One of them thrust his gun back into leather and shook out his rope. The noose sailed through the air and settled around Dawson's shoulders.

"Matt Lake and Steve Hardy," he said boldly. "Them masks you're wearin' ain't foolin' me none."

"All the same yuh was a fool to tell us yuh knowed us, Dawson," growled Lake as Hardy slid from the saddle and swiftly bound the prisoner. "Now we'll have to get rid of yuh plumb permanent."

About an hour later Tom Dawson found himself a prisoner in an old deserted line shack back in the mountains. He was tightly bound to a straight-back chair, his wrists behind him. Between the back of the lean young rancher and his tied arms was the back of the chair. It wasn't a comfortable position.

Lake and Hardy had departed, taking the saddle-bag containing the two thousand dollars with them. They had announced that they would be back just as soon as they finished digging a nice new grave for Dawson in a spot where it would not be easily found.

Dawson worked desperately but he could not release himself from his bonds. Suddenly he stopped struggling. He had heard a horse halt outside the shack.

"Tom—Tom Dawson!" a voice called. "Are you in there?"

Dawson's heart leaped. Molly Martin was outside the line camp shack.

"In here, quick, Molly!" shouted Dawson.

An instant later Molly appeared dressed in a green riding outfit. She hurried to Dawson and tried to untie him but the heavy rope was knotted too tightly for her slender fingers to undo.

"I saw the two masked men waiting for you down below when I rode up on the top of the ridge," she panted as she worked on the ropes. "Their backs were toward me and they didn't see me. I didn't want to yell to you for fear they would start shooting so I rode away. Then I watched, saw them take you prisoner and trailed them here." She frowned. "I can't get these ropes loose, Tom."

"My horse still outside?"

She nodded.

"Good, there's an old hunting knife in the saddle pocket. Get that Molly, and hurry. Them two jaspers will be comin' back soon."

Molly dashed outside and returned with the knife. At Dawson's orders she merely cut the ropes that bound his wrists. This left his lower arms free, but if he held his wrists behind

him the ropes around his chest made it look as though he were still securely fastened to the chair.

"I hid my horse back in the brush," said Molly. Her eyes flashed anxiously. They heard the sound of hoofbeats outside. "Somebody coming, Tom."

"Yes." Dawson nodded. "Duck out of sight, but first give me your gun."

Molly handed him the gun. There was a roll of old blankets on the bunk in one corner of the shack. The girl climbed into the bunk and covered herself with the blankets.

A horse stopped outside and a bandanna-masked man entered the shack. He went to Dawson and stood peering at the man tied to the chair.

"Lake tried to doublecross me," said the masked man. "Said there wasn't but five hundred dollars in your saddle-bag. I'm going to give yuh a chance to escape, Dawson." He drew out a knife and a gun and placed them on the floor in front of the prisoner. "When Lake comes back, yuh kin take care of him."

"Shore," said Dawson, "starting right now!"

His right hand appeared from behind his back and he covered the masked man with Molly's gun. "And I get just what yuh're trying to do, yuh sidewinder."

THE masked man snarled and had his gun half out of the holster when Dawson fired. The man in the bandanna mask pitched forward and sprawled motionless on the floor.

"No use hiding now, Molly," shouted Dawson. "Quick, grab that gun on the floor and that knife, and cut these ropes."

Molly was in the act of obeying when two men appeared in the open doorway. They were Lake and Hardy! Their guns were in their hands, but they both reeled back as the Colts of Dawson and the girl blasted lead at them.

Lake went down with a bullet in his leg, and Hardy received a chest wound.

Dawson rolled the body of the dead man over and removed the bandanna mask. Molly gasped as she saw the face that stared up at them.

"Bates Jefferson!" she exclaimed. "But why did he want you to get free, Tom."

"He didn't," said Dawson grimly. "This is the way I figure it, Molly. Lake and Hardy are Jefferson's hired gunslicks—at least they was until he died." The young owner of the Lazy D was covering the two wounded men with his gun as he talked. "Jefferson loaned me two thousand dollars today. Lake and Hardy had been told he was going to do it. Their orders were to hold me up and rob me of the money."

"That's right," said Lake. "But yuh spoiled the play by recognizing us. We didn't have no orders to kill

(Concluded on page 112)

Gun Judgment

By EDGAR L. COOPER

Author of "Tangled Trails," "Three Men From Guadeloupe," etc.

The posse that rode out was the pick of Belton City

Bullets Menace the Peace of Bosque County When a Passel of Bank Robbers Gets Busy!

"AND SO, my fellow citizens, I pledge you my word to enforce the law in Bosque County, even as did the Medes and Persians of ancient legend—without favor to any or fear of consequences. . . ."

White-headed Coley Mills halted his impassioned oratory in mid-stride clenched an upraised fist frozen in the start of a smashing emphasis upon his aims and qualifications as candidate for the office of district attorney.

He was staring out over the heads of his none too attentive audience, gaze fastened upon some spot to its left rear.

"Or fear of consequences," he repeated uncertainly, his mind patently not on his fervent exhortations. And the crowd about the speakers' platform in Pecan Grove turned almost as one to follow the suddenly pilfered attention of the Honorable Coley Mills.

Something was happening over there, close to the lemonade and "sody-pop" stand, next to the camp-meeting grounds on the Salado. Men were congregating; men were running. Those who had the advantage of seats upon the bunting-decked platform saw the thickening circle of masculinity that crowded the cold drink booth suddenly start milling and breaking clear, their delighted whoops yipping in an age-old tocsin call.

"Fight! Fight! Give 'em clearance, boys!"

Sheriff Sam McKinney, circulating about the spacious grounds of the Grove, sifting among the huge throng gathered there that sweltering July day, started at a lumbering lope toward the scene of disturbance. Up till now the all-day picnic and political rally had gone off without a sign of trouble, and the hour was close to four in the afternoon.

But now, he told himself grumpily, his hopes of a peaceful barbecue and post-meridian fanfare of oratory seemed doomed to blasting. Well, he'd tend to those trouble makers pronto, whoever they might be! He had figured the taboo on hard liquor and gun toting on the grounds would keep down such disturbances, but evidently his figuring was off.

Sheriff McKinney's growl changed to an abrupt oath before he reached the battlefield. For out of the turmoil of dust and weaving figures came a sudden hoarse shout of warning—and two close-spaced shots!

"That tears it!" groaned the lawman. "Whoever packed them guns—in defiance of today's ordinance against it—"

THE rest of the grim threat remained unspoken as he shoved a rough passage through the crowd. And when his narrowed eyes took in the setup, they slitted still more. His heavy features grew black as a Panhandle twister.

"You, huh?" he said explosively. "I mighta known it! If yuh've killed that feller I'm goin' to crack yore neck shore as a bronc eats hay, Barney Dow!"

The young puncher addressed, smoking six-shooter still in hand, turned around with a pained expression. Garbed in black Stetson and fancy-tooled Justins, silk-shirted and kerchiefed, he looked every inch the reckless, hell-take-the-hindmost young hairpin that he was. But right then his blunt, blue-eyed, belligerent features reflected outraged innocence raised to the nines.

"Why Sheriff!" he protested meekly—far too meekly. "Yuh wouldn't hang a feller for protectin' hisself, now, would yuh? Or for gettin' kinda hot under the collar when a hombre such as Pete Gibbs, there, calls him a liar to his face?"

"That'll do," the sheriff informed Senor Dow grimly. "I'm plumb sick and tired of yore hell-raisin' and trouble-makin' around these parts. With a plumb peaceable gatherin' here today, and everybody in Bosque County present but the Clanton gang, you've got to start somethin'!"

Purposefully, Sam McKinney took Dow's gun, which evidently had been packed a hideout inside his belly-band. He handed it to a deputy who stood nearby, with a jerk of his grizzled head toward young Dow.

"Take him to town and lock him up. The charge'll be assault to murder with prohibited weapon—until Pete Gibbs dies. Then we'll hang him for

murder! I reckon as Coley White, yonder, whose speech this whipper-snapper busted up, will be plumb *de*lighted to try to convict him, happens he's elected."

"Aw, Sam!" Young Barney Dow's protest sounded plaintive. "Yuh wouldn't jug a feller jest on 'count of a little political augerment! That Oakallay razorback plumb insulted a friend of mine—said nothin' but a damned idjit would stick up for him. Then when he was gettin' worsted in the fracas he goes for his hogleg—"

"That's enough!" The sheriff's voice was adamant, wholly without sympathy for Barney Dow and his political leanings. "I don't crave listenin' to any more of yore danged lies; I'm gettin' a prime bellyful of these pistol politics, disturbin' a peaceable gatherin' thisaway. Anybody'd think Bosque County was a tough-bailiwick, instead of a law-abidin' community that the State of Texas has got a right to be proud of!

"Or did have," finished Sam McKinney, glaring at young Dow, "until you started showin' off as a gun fannin' shikepoke! Git him outa my sight, Clem!"

Deputy Clem Biggers grinned as he escorted young Mr. Dow from the shady pecan grove into the hot sunlight of the Belton road. The sheriff had used pretty strong language, but being what he was by right of a comfortable majority in the last election, he had the upper hand. And until the last week he'd been without opposition in the forthcoming primaries. Just five days ago a gent named Coke Worley from the east neck of the county had announced against him.

And as Barney left the grounds, protesting volubly and in pained accents that the shooting of Oakalla Pete Gibbs had been perfectly justifiable, that it was even a creditable act, the lantern-jawed Coke Worley offered him covert sympathy—beyond earshot of the crowd. The aspirant to the office of sheriff was that kind.

"Plain self-defense," he told Dow. "Had I been in Sam's boots I wouldn't touched you, Dow. Hope yuh won't forget that, kid."

"Save yore sympathy for Pete Gibbs," Barney Dow retorted, having no use for the hypocritical Coke. "He ain't hurt none, much. You'n him can go back to Oakallay and tell the boys how I 'bushed him 'tween the galluses!"

WORLEY snarled and dropped back, with a venomous look at Dow.

"Lotta thanks yuh got—takin' up for McKinney—wasn't it?" he sneered. "Gettin' yore rump throwed in the can for the favor! That's gratitude! And you swaller it like a leetle man—yeah!"

The young waddy turned and started toward the scoffer, but Clem Biggers put in a restraining oar.

"Yuh've raised plenty Cain for one day, Barney," he said good-naturedly. "Le's ride. Sooner yuh get in the calaboose—well, all the quicker yuh'll get out!"

"Cheerful, ain't yuh, Clem?" Barney Dow sighed gustily. "Well, if I was turning in a deppity badge to get married, like you aim to, reckon I'd be plumb warbly cheerful, too. Hope the beer's cold in town!"

The deputy and his prisoner downed three big schooners apiece at Chalky John's before Biggers herded his pseudo-dejected guest of County Bosque into the one cell the town calaboose of Belton boasted.

As the deputy twisted the big key in the lock Dow sank down on the edge of the bunk, curled a quirly, and wondered what there would be for supper that night.

It wasn't long before the crestfallen young puncher found out. A Mex "dish-rassler" from the Elite Café showed up around dark with a pail of lukewarm java, half a dozen sour-dough biscuits and wedge of dried peach pie. He answered Barney Dow's

outraged protest with the excuse that everybody was still at the Ake's Crossing picnic, and a take-or-leave-it shrug.

"Damn Sam McKinney," growled young Dow. "I oughta vote for Coke Worley jest for the hell of it! Wonder what Mollie's doin' right now?"

Mollie being not only the most desirable young lady in the whole of Bosque County, but in Barney Dow's eyes the greatest girl in the wide and sovereign State of Texas. Mollie Maguire, niece of the sheriff and the lawman's housekeeper, daughter of his dead sister and apple of dour Sam McKinney's eye. She was nineteen years old and prettier than a speckled calf.

It was her job to feed such guests as found their way into Belton's official hostelry. Which might have accounted for the fact that the reckless youngster occupying the calaboose cell had taken his incarceration as philosophically as he had.

But Mollie Maguire was too busy dancing on the bunting-draped tabernacle at Ake's Crossing that night to feed Senor Dow, it looked like. And Barney put in several gloomy hours of darkness, brooding over that fact —and the idea that he was a mighty misunderstood young buckaroo.

But next morning the world looked much brighter when Mollie came to the calaboose door with a most ample breakfast tray held carefully in shapely bare arms. And Barney Dow's eyes spoke for him.

"Yuh're the purtiest thing in seven counties," they told her eloquently, "and I love yuh like all billy-hell."

But his lips said in blithe greeting:

"Hello, Mollie Mac. Gimme a kiss, honey!"

She carefully placed her tray on the wooden table outside the cell grating, and whisked off the white napkin, all the while affecting a patently elaborate innocence of Barney Dow's identity.

"I never kiss jail birds," she said primly, without looking at him—for the moment.

"Aw, Mollie!" Barney Dow pressed his face against the bars, and his gray-blue eyes were glinting as they surveyed the fluffy brown biscuits, crisp curled bacon and ham, fragrant scrambled eggs and ample pot of steaming coffee. "Aw, shucks! You ain't gettin' crochety like old Sam?"

DARK brows drew down over violet-hued eyes as she looked him up and down with entire lack of friendliness. "A fine way to talk about my uncle, I must say!" Molly said resentfully. "Especially after standing me up the way you did last night!"

"But, hellamile, honey!" Dow's voice was virtue outraged to the uttermost. "I couldn't rightly keep that date with yuh, bein' as how I was locked up here by yore damn—I mean uncle! No more'n I could help that little fracas yesterday evenin'. That Oakallay hombre was runnin' down a friend of mine. Said he couldn't track a elyphant through ten foot of snow, and didn't know his armpit from his appetite 'bout John Lawin'—" Barney broke off abruptly, finishing a little lamely: "Anyhow, he threw down on me first."

"I'm not interested in the troubles of you Darst Creek cowhands," Mollie told him with asperity. "Will you take cream in your coffee, Senor Rowdy Dow?" She said that last very sweetly.

"I'm gonna take a pair of chaps to you some day!" Barney Dow, better known as "Rowdy," promised. "Yuh wipe some of that Irish orneriness out'n yore system, lady. You know danged well I don't ruin prime coffee with heifer juice!"

"Am I supposed to know?" she asked, with lifted brows. "Some of those I feed in here put carbolic in it, others use turpentine. I can't keep up with all the individual preferences!"

"Aw, Mollie!" Barney Dow's jaws were working industriously, as he stuffed half a buttered biscuit into his mouth and grinned in a way that indicated he was anything but the crestfallen and chastened captive which his plaintive tone indicated. "I didn't aim to get mixed up in this, shore 'nuff. Don't bawl a feller out this early in the mornin'. It ain't my fault that I'm a good Democrat, an' take my politics plumb serious!"

MISS MAGUIRE tilted her adorably turned up nose, eyed him most scornfully.

"Pistol politics," she retorted pointedly, passing the refilled coffee cup through the bars, then significantly dusting her hands. "I suppose that uncle's right. He says you're not worth the powder and lead to blow you to—"

"I know—yuh needn't finish it!" Dow grimaced. "Likewise he called me, among other things, a gun-fannin' so and such, without the six-shooter judgment God promised a shikepoke. When yuh goin' to kiss me, Mollie?"

"Not as long as you're in jail, anyhow!" Miss Maguire retorted. "How did you happen to get into such a mess, anyhow? Don't you know that Pete Gibbs is likely to die, and you'll be tried for murder?"

"Naw," denied Barney Dow. "Yuh couldn't kill that son of a sinner with dynamite. He's too dang ornery. He'll be out in two-three days, meaner'n ever an' twice as poison-tongued. One of them Oakallay doubletoughs, yeah!"

Briefly he acquainted Mollie with the incident—a fist fight turned into gunplay by the losing battler.

"If that danged Scotch-Irish uncle of yores wasn't so plumb muley unreasonable 'bout a man's liberties an' right to defend hisself," he wound up, "he wouldn'ta put me in here. Not that I'm overly kickin', howsoever."

He grinned smugly at Mollie licked his lips with vast relish. The last crumb of her man-sized breakfast had disappeared.

"With such vittles and service, lady," he observed, "I'm willin' to camp in here plumb till election day."

"Indeed!" Then curiosity got the better of her scorn again. "Who was Pete Gibbs talking about, when he said—"

"Well," Dow replied slowly, as if debating whether or not to let her in on this, "I'll tell yuh, providin' it don't get no further. He was referrin' to yore illustrious uncle when he said that a real sheriff woulda nailed that Clanton gang long before now. A sheriff like Coke Worley, for instance."

"Oh, he did, did he?" Mollie's eyes and face flamed. "He wouldn't say that to Uncle Mac's face, darn him!"

"That's what I kinda told Pete," drawled Dow, grinning. "He called me a liar, then the fireworks started. Gimme that kiss, honey! If yuh jest knew how danged bad I'm wantin' one!"

Mollie told him he was several kinds and varieties of so-and-such, and busied herself at smoothing her rumpled black hair after breaking away. The sheriff's heavy step sounded outside, and Miss Maguire hastily gathered up the breakfast tray, her Irish loveliness bewitchingly flushed.

One might have surmised, with perfect accuracy, that Miss Mollie Maguire and young Barney Dow had something by way of an understanding.

Pete Gibbs did not die. True to Dow's prediction, the red-headed hairpin from the "Salt Fork" of Oakalla neighborhood was too wart-hog-hided to cash in from a mere bullet puncture in his barrel chest. In three days he was sitting up in his room at the Salado House, mean as a badger and keeping the vicinity blue with choice remarks.

And Sheriff McKinney, with every outward appearance of reluctance, unlocked the calaboose door and restored Barney Dow to freedom. A big

thewed individual was the Bosque lawman, his heavy features adorned with a huge graying mustache, and he wore his Colts in a leather-lined hip pocket holster, instead of swung from a cartridge belt.

"Here's yore trouble maker," he grunted, holding out Dow's six-freighted belt. "Oughta take it away from yuh for good, only I know yuh'd trot right down to Kincaid's and buy another. You dang gun-totin' young whelps make me tired, know it?"

"Not worth the powder an' lead to blow me to hell an' gone, yuh mean." Barney Dow grinned, strapping his gear in place. "Without the gun judgment Gawd gave a shikepoke, among other compliments. A hammer-thumbin' jassack—that's me!"

Sam McKinney took a chew of tobacco and eyed the flippant young rider coldly.

"I've been give to understand," he said with heavy meaning, "that yuh've sorta been settin' up to my niece, young feller."

"That so?" The grin faded from Barney Dow's bronzed face. "And who told yuh all that, Sheriff?"

"She did. Mentioned it to me awhile back."

"Well, it's plumb correct. Mollie's dabbed her loop over me for keeps."

"She'll never hitch up with yore kind, long as I've got any say-so in the matter," the sheriff said grimly. "Not any, she won't. That gal's gonna have a chance in life. What have you got to offer her? Forty a month punchin' cows on some other man's spread. A stock pony worth mebbe fifty bucks, and a kak worth mebbe a hundred an' fifty more."

HE LET that sink in.

"Likewise, a gun hand that's always gettin' yuh in trouble," he added pointedly. "Yuh've been in half a dozen powder ruckuses in the last three months, that I know of. If yuh hadn't been plain damn lucky this time, yuh'd be facin' the rope for drillin' Pete Gibbs. Yuh got no judgment, Dow. Not a whit. Yuh do yore thinkin'—if any—after the thing's happened, instead of before. No more gun sense than a danged lizard. Think I want Mollie tied up to any proposition like that?"

"I don't aim to let nobody run over me," said Barney Dow sullenly.

"Oh, hell no, course not!" scoffed Sam McKinney. "Yuh're one of these cocky cookies that prances around with a chip on yore shoulder, jest eggin' somebody to knock her off. Then, when Pete Gibbs or somebody else calls yore play, yuh go after yore cutter."

He stood up, jerked a thumb toward the door, indicating that the confab was over.

"Mollie's like a lot of other gals," he grumbled. "Got romantic notions, or thinks she has. I ain't denyin' that yuh've sorta turned her head, got her thinkin' she wants to marry yuh. Well, she ain't—long as I can prevent it. There's nothin' to yuh, son, but a eye for trouble!"

Young Barney Dow nodded shortly, tilted his Stetson recklessly over one eye and left with a swank he was far from feeling right then. The truth generally is a sharp set of spurs, and there wasn't much that Senor Dow of Darst Creek could offer in rebuttal right then.

"Reckon I can vote for Coke Worley," he muttered resentfully, "seein' as how I've paid my poll tax."

"Good-by," cut in the sheriff curtly. "And don't come back here any sooner than yuh can help. I'm too busy to monkey with yuh."

"Yuh won't be," retorted Dow, "when the votes are counted!"

Hitching up his gunbelt, young Mr. Dow swaggered up the main drag of Belton, heading in the direction of Chalky John's welcome oasis.

"Damn Texas politics, anyhow," he was thinking. "Plumb from governor to constable!"

It was noon the following day that the Waco Lampasas stage rolled into Belton and "Jube" Grimes, its driver, climbed groggily down from his seat and faced the crowd of curious at the station. His right arm was stiff and blood-stained, and it developed that the oldster had, by sheer grit and cussedness, hazed the four-horse team all the way from Button Willow Bend with a slug-smashed right shoulder.

Inside the stage were six badly scared passengers. The guard, "Curly" Donaldson, old Jube explained with lurid profanity, was lying back at the Bend, deader than Pontius Pilate. Killed without a chance.

"Them damn Clanton's agin!" Grimes snarled, as Doc Partlow worked on his shoulder. "Opened on us without a word of warnin'. Got me first crack. Curly took a chance and stopped a slug through the head. They ain't any doubt who the holdups was, neither. I'd know Mitch Clanton's ugly mug in hell's hot pit, damn his hide! Can't any mask hide them missin' fingers on his right hand, by thunder!"

The stage agent told Sheriff McKinney that the robbers must have been given a bum steer, because all their plunder was a slim mail bag containing little of value. And as the grim-faced sheriff jerked a thick forefinger at various individuals in the gathered crowd, with a word for them to report at his office with guns and horses, young Barney Dow noted subconsciously that Pete Gibbs was standing at the window of his room in the hotel, to all appearances a most interested spectator to the excitement.

Candidate Coke Worley was also circulating about, adding his sly words aimed at the ears of scowling voters. For men were eyeing Sam McKinney, and there was unspoken accusation in their looks. Why hadn't the sheriff rounded up Mitch Clanton's gang before this? What was he going to do now? Avoid that malpais Oakalla neighborhood where the bandits would likely head, with election day so near, and Oakalla boasting many votes?

SHERIFF McKINNEY said little, but inside half an hour a riding posse of twenty special deputies gathered at the courthouse, heeled with six-shooters and Winchesters. The Clantons had a good start, but these men had fresh horses, and could both shoot and ride hard. The posse was the pick of Belton City, as a matter of fact.

"We won't take any chances with them hombres," McKinney told them bleakly. "It's Boot Hill posse, this time. Reckon we've stood jest about all we aim to from Mitch and his crowd. Le's ride, boys!"

Twenty men, picked and true, galloping out of Belton in a fog of dust. A score of Bosque riders racing westward toward a jumble of scrub-oak ridges—the sort of hills through which fugitives might toll pursuers for days in a maze of crossed trails and blind leads.

And while Sheriff McKinney and his posse grimly combed the blackjack and scrub of the brakes around Button Willow Bend on the Salado, a quintet of tough-visaged and dust-coated horsemen had knotted up for a final pow-wow in the dense shinnery a scant quarter of a mile below Belton City. A big, burly ruffian with *jefé* written all over him was growling last instructions to his henchmen.

"They won't be nothin' to this!" he sneered. "Won't be nobody left in town but old men an' women folks. All we gotta do is ride up to the bank an' help ourselves, *sabe?* Like takin' candy from a kid."

Mitch Clanton spat black plug cut, glanced over his four riders.

"You, Keg"—he nodded to one of his two brothers—"go in with Powd. Powd'll handle the *dinero.* Stubby'll stand watch at the front door. Me an' Wes'll keep the street clear for a getaway, and take care of any gent that

mebbe gets ideas. Anybody that makes any funny moves whatsoever gets plugged, savvy?"

An affirmative growl as men tightened cinches, looked to their weapons. This was going to be a good joke on Sam McKinney. He didn't know that the stage holdup had been just a ruse to draw the men of Belton away from the county seat. That sheriff would be chasing robbers up Oakalla way until dark, maybe longer. The Clanton boys would have all the time in the world they needed—and then some!

"Oughta haul twenty thousand outa this," said Mitch, chuckling. "Clean up big. An' when old Law-Johnny Sam'l gets back and finds what's happened whilst him an' his posse was gone—"

He left the rest to their imagination, putting gigs to his bronc and leading the pace townward. The quintet rode silently, grimly, strung out in file, toward their real business of the day. . . .

Not all the able-bodied men of Belton had joined the wolf hunt, however. Young Barney Dow, repairing disgruntledly to Chalky John's thirst emporium, looked over the barroom denizens with jaundiced eyes. He had not been among those deputized, down at the stage station. Sam McKinney's roving glance had not missed him, but McKinney clearly did not care for his services. The sheriff wanted men of judgment—gun judgment. A hammer-thumbin' shikepoke wouldn't do!

"To hell with this town," Barney Dow was thinking. He didn't have to hang around Bosque County. There was plenty of greener grass over the hill. If it wasn't for Mollie, he'd roll his slicker and ride to where the winds came from, head for some country that wasn't on any skim milk and spinach diet!

The barroom was almost deserted. Coke Worley was not among the chosen posse, either, and appeared smugly satisfied that he had been ignored, as he made himself comfortable at a table.

And the Honorable Coley Mills, candidate for district attorney, had rheumatism as his reason, and came hobbling in the oasis by aid of a stout stick. The proprietor and two other spavined oldsters constituted the remaining population of the Legal Tender Saloon.

DOW ordered whiskey. The rest of the day, and all of the evening, was before him. He meant to use those hours pleasantly and profitably.

"To hell with Belton!" young Dow suddenly said aloud, with a glance at the chalk-eyed proprietor. "The more I see of it, the hellisher it seems! A good dump to be—*from!*"

"Uh-huh," acknowledged John.

It was not his job to dispute the assertations of customers, no matter how far-fetched such remarks might be. Especially, when voiced by a hot-spurred young hellion who had punctured Pete Gibbs in an argument over county politics, and was said to have no more gun-gumption than a road-runner.

"Looky," continued Dow. "Why'nt the sheriff of Bosque take me along on that wolf hunt? Jest 'cause he don't like me, that's why! Got no appreciation about him. He thinks I'm some kind of a fresh varmint without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity. That's what he thinks!"

Barney Dow had heard a political candidate make the above statement in a speech once, and he had not forgotten it. The quotation came to him frequently in bibulous moments.

"That's what Sam McKinney thinks!" he reaffirmed with positiveness.

"Which shore is a shame," sympathized Chalky, around his evil-smelling old Virginia cheroot.

"I beg to disagree," put in the Hon. Coley. "A posse has to be composed of responsible individuals, not a lot of

harebrained young mavericks who haven't got—"

"Yeah, I know it by heart!" interrupted the aggrieved Barney Dow. "No gun judgment. Jest 'cause I let a little daylight into that red-headed yahoo, Pete Gibbs, an' drained some of the orneriness outa his freckled carcass, I'm a plumb irresponsible half-wit with a hogleg."

He downed the drink, threw the price on the table.

"Well, reckon I'd rather be left to home on account of that," he remarked meaningly, "instead of havin' mighty convenient sort of rheumatics—or else bein' plumb worthless no-'count, like some folks I could name and touch without walkin' my legs off!"

"Looky here!" bleated Coke Worley. "You got no call to be a-talkin' about me'n Coley thataway!"

There was a sudden interruption. Something that sounded like a shot from up the street. Chalky John removed his cheroot as he waddled to the front of the bar, peered curiously through the open window.

"Good hell!" Chalky's voice was an excited yelp. "It's a holdup! They're stickin' up the bank, so help me if they ain't!"

Dow looked over the slatted batwing doors, Coley Mills and Coke Worley crowding to stare over his shoulders. Diagonally across and some three doors up the street two masked and mounted men sat their cayuses in front of the Central Texas State Bank. Forty-fives were held alertly in their fists, and their eyes roved up and down, sideward and across the hot, deserted street.

Three nags with empty hulls stood at the hitch-rail, and a third robber was in the open door of the bank, watching inside. With battered hats pulled low over their foreheads, and lathery horses dust-caked, the men appeared to have ridden considerable distance under a July sun.

"Look inside the bank!" Chalky exclaimed hoarsely. "See them fellers movin' 'round, huh? They're shore gittin' the place!"

Young Rowdy Dow grinned maliciously, wickedly. He looked at Chalky, then back at the raspy-breathing Worley and Mills. He felt curiously detatched, as if his mind, startlingly clear, were separated from his body.

And through that mind was running a picture—of a sheriff's picked posse, the flower of Belton City's stern manhood, combing the underbrush around Button Willow Bend for the gang which, if Dow was not greatly mistaken, was at this very moment looting the bank across the street!

HE CHUCKLED outright, as he hunched up his gunbelt.

"Yeah," he said, nodding, "looks like the Clantons are cleanin' up, don't it?"

"My Gawd!" gulped Coley Mills. "What can we do? We can't fight that whole bunch!"

"Yuh're plumb, pat correct, Senator," agreed Dow. "But we shore as hell can watch 'em."

And as the aspiring prosecutor and prospective county sheriff stared at him, Barney Dow added sweetly:

"The sheriff is the kind of a gent that believes in usin' judgment. That's the kind of hombre friend Sam is. That's why his nibs is headin' ridin' posse with Belton's finest way out yonder in the tall-and-uncut, while Mitch Clanton an' his merry men circles 'round 'em and drops into town jest casual-like. Yeah—"

Coolly Rowdy Dow took out his makings, proceeding to build a smoke.

"Betcha that's why they held up the stage!" Coke Worley croaked dismally, breathing like a distempered horse. "To toll Sam and the boys away from town, by grabs! Doggoned if it ain't!"

"So she percolates at last, huh, Coke?" remarked Dow. "Now's yore chance to get elected, feller! Get out there an' do yore stuff. Clean out the Clantons single-handed, an' put old

Bosque on the map. Coley'll help yuh, mebbe—he's the prosecutor. Them that you don't kill—why, Coley'll hang high as Haman!"

The way Worley and Mills shrank from such a suggestion expressed their sentiments louder than words. They had no desire to sally forth in search of civic glory.

And Barney Dow, noting, laughed mockingly through Durham smoke.

"We better stay right where we be," Chalky John opined nervously. "We couldn't avail nothin' agin them Clanton boys, I reckon."

"As I remarked before, Chalky," commented Dow, "the sheriff believes in usin' judgment. And me, I aim to use it in big gobs from right now on out. Tacklin' that there bunch out yonder would be plumb, teetotal suicidal, way I figger. Here I am, Chalky my friend, an' here li'l Rowdy Dow stays. I don't give a brindle damn if them Oakallay wart-hogs ride off with the whole dang town under their arms. Lock, stock an' barrel. Nobody's gonna accuse me of havin' no more judgment than a shikepoke, from this minute on!"

He paused, looking into the street. From the bank door was emerging a pint-sized edition of *Jefe* Mitch, carrying a bulgy sack in his left hand. In his right was an eared-back six-shooter. He started across the slab-stone sidewalk toward the horses, saying something to the big mounted leader. And a masked gent who came out of the bank behind him carried another sack.

Coley Mills withdrew from his observation post with an alacrity much out of tune with any alleged rheumatism.

Candidate Coke Worley ducked like a scared Kildee and flattened against the wall. Chalky John grunted, lumbered toward the back of the bar as if seeking something. For the burly horseman before the bank, staring hard at the doors of the Legal Tender, suddenly triggered a warning shot which smashed into the lintel a few inches above the spectators' crowding heads.

"Now, is that nice?" complained Barney Dow, slightly lessening the target of his black Stetson over the batwings. "Here I am, mindin' my own business, playin' the part of a durned interested spectator, and—"

"Where in hell's my gun?" Chalky was growling. "Can't think where I put it, by juggy!"

But suddenly young Rowdy Dow was not so casual, mocking. For he was staring, with widening gaze, at a girl who had just stepped out of Spangler's Grocery and Beef Market, two doors above the bank. A girl with packages in her arms, and who had halted stock-still and wide-eyed at the extraordinary scene happening before her.

Quite patently she had paid scant attention to the gunshots, or had misinterpreted them if she had. But as the significance of the situation flashed across Mollie Maguire's quick mind, she opened her mouth and gave tongue to a piercing scream of far-reaching warning.

TO a man, the startled quintet of Clantons whirled toward the sound. The stubby hairpin with the money sack dropped hammer from his hip. And Barney Dow, his own mouth open with its shout of warning to Mollie died a-borning as he saw Mollie Maguire start forward, stumble and fall asprawl, her bundles flying and a second screech choked off abruptly.

The slatted batwings of Chalky John's oasis shattered from the impact of a frenzied young puncher's orey-eyed charge through them. And Rowdy Dow, late exponent of good judgment and minding one's own business, was shooting as he came. With curses on his lips and black hell on his face he went into a hunkered crouch, gun spitting red lightning.

And in the space of an eye-bat six-

shooter showdown slapped cards on Belton City's main street.

The stubby busky who had fired at Mollie dropped his pistol and clawed at his chest, the bulging sack in his left hand still held with frenzied grasp. His curse sounded choked as he slowly wilted—so slowly that it seemed he never would touch the dust that clouded around the plunging rearing horses.

His two masked compadres leaped for the cover of those panicked mounts, firing at Barney Dow, trying to fork leather. The two mounted hombres were shooting, their curses and yells rising above the furor. Bullets whanged and thudded into the saloon front, and Dow leaped for the scanty shelter of a porch chair leaning against the wall—a clumsy contraption made of a sawed-out liquor keg.

Something had snapped in his brain at sight of Mollie falling over there. Though his veins seemed on fire with the red haze in his eyes, his trigger hand was cold as ice. And even as a hot slug stung his left arm and another nicked his gunbelt, he thumbed a shot at one of the horsemen and saw him sway, then tumble off his rearing pony, who promptly lined away down the street, stirrups flying.

Mitch Clanton, his hands full with his terrified cayuse, was cursing and raving like a maniac. They had succeeded in entering the county seat without attracting attention, and up to the moment of Mollie Maguire's startled scream, things had gone much their own way. But now, thanks to the advent of that orey-eyed young hairpin on the saloon stoop, the entire setup of Mitch's cunning scheme had been abruptly changed!

The fall of Powd Clanton with the sack, and the stampeding of the wounded Wes Dawkins' nag had further complicated matters. If that trigger-wolfin' so-and-so was not gunned out in one hellacious hurry, it looked like a bad day for the Oakalla Clantons.

The thought smashed sickeningly into big Mitch's brain, driven by a .45 slug that sledged into his beefy chest! He bellowed in a voice fraught with unutterable fury and fear as the blazing street grew black and cold, his numb hands trying to hang on to a queerly dancing kak stem.

He did not remember his spur hanging in stirrup cuff as he went overboard. He did not know his horse dragged him fifty yards down the street before the rowel tore itself free. For the life had suddenly run out of Big Mitch Clanton, and he lay limp and flat on the sandy street. So do *jefés* die, the same as ordinary hombres.

The *zip* of a bullet past Barney Dow's face was like the drum of partridge wings, as he fumblingly tried to reload. Slugs were raking into the barrel-house chair. He had been hit half a dozen times, yet was conscious of no pain whatever. Only of a warm moisture that trickled down into his eyes, beclouding his vision, slowing his fingers to agonizedly snail pace.

THE two remaining buskys were laired behind their mounts, shooting. Rowdy Dow nailed one as the fellow was aiming a Winchester across his saddle—nailed him high in the chest. Vaguely Dow saw the rifle fall on one side of the horse and its owner on the other, while the pony danced away a short distance and came to a quivering standstill, too frightened to bolt.

The lone remaining bandit, "Keg" Clanton, made a dash for the bank door, stooping and weaving. And Dow, thumbing twice deliberately, as he recklessly swayed upright, watched the last of the three brothers stumble and plough down, then try to crawl away on hands and knees. Dow saw it dimly, for his vision was fading and his legs were refusing to hold him up.

What he did not see was the figure in the hotel window, up the street, lining a sight on him. Nor did he feel

the slug that smashed him like a club, dropped him like a felled steer against the wall of the Legal Tender Saloon. But he did remember staring at his legs, and wondering in a vague sort of way why in hell they felt as if they had been whacked off at the hips.

Something roared a gout of smoke and flame from the saloon window behind Barney Dow, and the red-headed sniper in the second-story window of the Salada House lurched across the sill and dangled there, his torso full of blue-whistler buckshot from Chalky John's sawed-off Greener.

"Always did mistrust that dang Oakallay jigger, Pete Gibbs," said the saloonman, blowing smoke out of his shotgun. "Well, he won't do no more gulchin'—dang his sorrel-topped soul!"

Some time later young Senor Dow opened hazy eyes upon the barroom of the Legal Tender. He was stretched upon the one pool table, and Doc Peters was finishing his patching-up job. Faces crowded all about—anxious, admiring faces, shifting like a blurred kaleidoscope.

"Mollie—" Barney Dow muttered. "How— Where's she, Doc? I—I saw that—Clanton skunk—shoot her. Hell, I'm okay—"

"Guess yuh'll hold water awhile," chuckled the cowtown medico. "Any young tough cooky that could clean out that Clanton bunch, single-handed, is jest too infernal ornery to make a die of it!"

"Yep." Chalky John nodded. "Don't 'low yuh'll ride to Peckerwood Hill this trip, Barney. Even if yore Oakallay pal, Pete Gibbs, is all laid out for there. Happens that Keg Clanton's over yonder in the bank, sorta outa his head and talkin' a heap. Yeah, a whole heap. Says Petey was sorta a lookout and spotter for the gang. Funny, ain't it?"

"Pretty near as funny as the way Coke Worley tucked tail and lit out when the posse come back," agreed Doc Peters, grinning. "Wouldn't surprise me much if Coke don't withdraw from the sheriff's race—before Chalky here gets through talkin'! If it hadn't been for you, son, no telling what—"

"Yeah," Rowdy Dow muttered bleakly. "The hammer-thumbin' jassack—ask the sheriff! Where—how's Mollie, dammit?"

"All right, I reckon," answered the doc. "She wasn't shot, if that's what yuh mean. She jest screeched and fell down when that slug whistled past. But guess Mollie can tell yuh."

Young Dow turned his gaze as a cool hand touched his face. Mollie Maguire was looking at him, her face a little pale and strained, but with eyes steady enough. Eyes filled with unspoken meaning, as she said, distinctly and in a quiet voice:

"Barney, you utter gumptionless, wild Irish damfool!"

AND with a catchy throb in her throat she bent swifly, pressed her cheek against Rowdy Dow's for an instant, then kissed him full upon the mouth.

Sheriff Sam McKinney stared down at Dow, lips pursed and eyes hooded. More than twelve thousand bucks had been saved the bank by this young wampus-cat's gun fandango, and he was up for a healthy reward from grateful bank officials—to say nothing of the John Law bounty on the Clanton pelts. The sheriff of Bosque knew when he was euchered.

"Better give him another, Mollie," he told his niece resignedly. "Reckon we can use a lad like him in the family, after all. And—there's a deppity job goin' to be vacant next two, three weeks." Sam McKinney added.

Rowdy Dow looked up at the grizzled lawman, a grin warping across his wound-drawn face.

"A trigger-senseless jassack in the family, huh?" he murmured. "Well, Sheriff—" He eased to an elbow, his voice noticeably stronger as he finished: "Yuh're shore gonna have the *chance* to use, one Old-timer!"

GUNSMOKE

on the RANGE

Curt sighted the rustler trying to sneak up under cover

Back to a Rangeland Where His Name Means Death, Curt Mason Returns to Sweep the Town Clear of His Father's Ambushers!

A Complete Novelet

By CHARLES N. HECKELMANN

Author of "The Waddy Takes Over," "Law Comes to Saddle City," etc.

CHAPTER I

Harsh Welcome

CURT MASON was halfway across Dawn's main street when a shout pulled him around. He halted, legs braced wide apart, brown eyes reaching out swiftly toward the darkness. His face was broad and irregular. Now his mouth went thin and firm.

He waited, tense, watchful, catching all the stray noises that pulled at the night's stillness.

"Well?" he asked quietly. His eyes swung around to the batwing doors of

the saloon. Three men in the doorway looked on interestedly.

"What brought yuh back to Dawn?" the voice from the stable demanded.

Curt Mason stood his ground. He felt the submerged tide of hostility in this town. It surged around him. It should have warned him. But something grim and reckless in his nature held him rooted where he was, waiting for a break in this deadly game.

"What brought yuh back to Dawn?" the voice repeated. "Speak up!"

"Mebbe yuh can tell me that," Curt answered dryly.

"Yore old man died with a bullet in his back five years ago," grated the man hidden in the depths of the stable. "Right now this town ain't needin' any Masons. So yuh can clear out an' go back where yuh came from, unless yuh're hankerin' for a dose o' what yore old man got."

Curt's eyelids dropped and his lips curled away from his mouth in a remote smile. His eyes grew sultry with the wildness that rolled through his lithe, muscular frame.

"Reckon I'll risk it, just to get a crack at the jasper who bushwhacked him," he answered gruffly.

Suddenly Curt's right hand darted to his hip. He leaped to one side, whipping his gleaming Colt. A gun barked from the black stable. A bullet furrowed the dust where he had stood. The blasts merging into one sharp report, Curt poured three shots at the orange tongue of flame that marked the hidden gunman's position.

A shrill scream of pain answered, then the soft fall of a heavy body. Curt holstered his gun. He glanced toward the saloon. The three men at the door lingered there a moment, studying him. Without hurry, Curt strode to the hitch-rack before the low building.

He made no move to enter the stable. No one else stirred in this strangely silent town. Voices came from the saloon, but they were a hushed murmur. He took his long, deliberate look at the town, vaulted without haste into the saddle of a big bay stallion. Wheeling deliberately from the hitch-rack, he jogged down the street.

Boots scuffed the saloon steps and voices charged the air. Men poured into the street, racing for the stable. Curt touched his heels to the bay's ribs. Swiftly, he swept out of Dawn, striking for the western ridge.

TEN minutes later he topped a low rise and looked back toward the blob of lights that marked the town. No sound of pursuing hoofs reached him.

His wild, reckless mood left him. He pushed on, morosely, up the narrow trail that climbed through thick timber. Wind washed down from the high ranges and soughed through the trees. Memory of this trail, the timber that crowded close to its edge, threatening to overrun it, saddened him. It had been home.

He knew every trail that threaded the upper range. All this rugged, rolling country, with its lush upper pastures boxed in by the high crags and bluffs of the mountain chain, was like an open book to him. He recalled the thriving cattle where old Tom Mason ruled his spread, making it grow beneath his toiling hands.

When cattle began to disappear, Tom Mason had fought the rustlers. He was a hard man, quick with a gun and utterly fearless. There were several small skirmishes. When the big raid occurred, it took almost every steer Tom Mason owned. In return, he led a handful of his own riders through the timber in hot pursuit.

That was the end of it. None of those riders ever came back. Later, their bodies were found in the scrub-filled bottom of a canyon high up on the mesa.

Curt had wanted to go on that wild night ride. He was nineteen then, a fast gun-hand and old enough to fight rustlers. The elder Mason glanced

at his wife's stricken face. Bruskly he ordered Curt to stay with her. Curt rebelled, but it did no good. Tom Mason ruled his spread with an iron hand.

Curt stayed—long enough for the grim ride to the canyon to bring the body of Tom Mason back home. Long enough for hate to grow in him, hate that steeled his muscles and drove all reason out of him. They still lived, those unknown killers responsible for the mound of earth on the ridge. Curt could stand the killing. But Tom Mason had been shot in the back.

As long as revenge was still to be achieved, Curt wanted to stay in Dawn. There were no cattle. There was nothing but his hatred. But love for his mother was stronger. Tom Mason's widow couldn't bear the sight of Dawn, with its rolling hills, its brawling streams, its cool, green, grazing lands. That was Tom Mason's cemetery.

So they went out of Dawn, traveled beyond the eastern divide to forget what could never be forgotten. His mother lingered for five years before death eased her grief. There was nothing to hold Curt after she had passed on. He returned to Dawn, for the same job of killing remained to be done.

Curt's shoulders came forward. He thrust aside his somber thoughts. The stallion carried him out of the timber, into a meadow, which he followed until a rising slope took him upland again. The trail grew rocky, sliced through a low wall of shale and rock. A swift stream tumbled along behind a screen of trees. Its silver glitter disappeared beyond a line of bluffs that reared dark, uneven shapes against the night.

Curt struck rolling rangeland again. He pushed the bay to the crest of a brush-covered knoll. He drifted slowly along the rim, his eyes studying the valley below him. It lay dark and dim, surrounded by a circle of jagged buttes. Nestling close to the ridge, the dull gray shape of a low ranchhouse cast a black shadow on the blacker land.

LIGHT flashed in a golden stream from a window in the house. The glow illumined part of the rear yard, yellowing shadowed corrals and a barn shoved back against the rising hill.

Curt watched the light, his irregular face a puzzled, luminous disk. He sat loosely in the saddle, waiting for familiar sounds that could never come. There lay his home before him.

"That jasper in the stable musta known I had company waitin' for me," he reasoned. "Mebbe he thought he'd give me a taste o' the kind o' welcome waitin' for me." His lips thinned into a humorless smile. "That's fine. I'm in a welcomin' mood myself."

Slipping leather, he hitched the stallion to a tree. He slid cautiously down the slope, catching stunted pines to retard his progress. The light from the house gleamed bright and close. A horse nickered in the corral. Soundlessly, Curt moved to the rear door.

He ducked down, skirted the low porch and flattened out against the wall. Three long strides took him to the window. A sweep of his hand removed his broad-brimmed hat. He ventured a quick glance through the window.

A thick-set, broad-shouldered man with bushy eyebrows and a livid scar running half across his face, sat at a rough table in the room. He was alone.

Curt pulled quickly away and raced to the rear door. He peered toward the corral. He could make out two horses there, meaning another man must be somewhere about. His six-gun flashed to his hand as he stepped to the door. It was open on a crack. He prodded it gently with his foot. It swung open just enough for him to step inside. Nothing happened.

He crouched through the hall. It

was dark, yet thoroughly familiar. At its end, a broad sliver of light carved the darkness. He moved forward. Another door gave under his gentle touch. The protesting squeak of a rusty hinge pulled up the head of the man seated at the table.

"Yuh can get out now, Beall," snapped Curt, his voice chill and dangerous. "I allus thought yuh were crooked. Findin' yuh here on my ranch sorta clinches the idea."

Brad Beall looked up into a pair of grim, merciless eyes—eyes that were young but had seen enough to take the laughter out of them. His right hand crawled furtively, slowly backward.

"Hold it!" warned Curt, his weapon leveled.

Beall's thick, sensuous lips broke away from yellowing teeth. His face showed no sign of surprise or shock.

"Mason, yore old man was killed buckin' something that was too big for him."

Curt spoke in a soft, cold voice. "Which is why I'm back. Mebbe yuh know somethin' about that?"

"Yuh still have time to get out. Masons ain't wanted in Dawn."

"Yuh're the second hombre to tell me that tonight. The other jasper is through talkin'. I come back for my ranch, so clear out."

Beall's jaw tightened and his lips drew together.

"It *was* yore ranch, Mason. I kinda like it here myself. Been usin' the spread as an overflow for my steers."

"Yuh're gettin' out, Beall, an' takin' yore steers with you. This is my range an' that means hands off. A bunch o' my riders are drivin' a big herd in from across the divide in the mornin'. Yuh'd better not have any o' yore cattle around when they breeze in."

BEALL sneered. His glance moved uninterestedly to the door. Curt wheeled, stepping back. The butt of a gun crashed down, grazing his shoulder. A lanky man lost his balance, stumbled into the room.

Curt's six-shooter exploded with a loud roar. A lead slug knocked Beall's upswinging weapon from his hand. It clattered to the floor. Curt's second shot ripped a shriek from the man by the door. He swayed drunkenly but derricked his gleaming six-shooter. Hot lead whistled past Curt's face and slogged into the wall. Spread-legged, Curt pumped another shot from his Colt.

The gawk choked and buckled at the hips. Half-bowed, he staggered against the wall and slid down it to the floor.

Beall let out an angry bellow and lunged toward Curt. The young rancher swung about, his six-gun raised. Beall's fist smashed down. Gnarled fingers clasped Curt's gun-wrist and twisted hard. Caught off guard by the big man's rush, Curt dropped the pistol and fell backward.

Beall ripped a hard left to the solar plexus, then tore in close with a bull-like snort. Curt's teeth snapped together with a sharp cracking sound as Beall's head battered his chin. He fought thick arms that crushed his chest. A knee came up in a swift arc and caught Curt in the pit of the stomach. He sagged when Beall split his upper lip with another slashing blow.

Desperately, Curt squeezed Beall's broad middle. They wrestled savagely against the wall, lurched sideways, crashed against the table. It overturned and the two men thumped to the floor. Curt bounded quickly to his feet. Beall rose ponderously. But he grabbed up a chair and hurled it viciously over Curt's bobbing head.

Beall charged in close, his ugly skull low. Again it cracked Mason's jaws together. Fire blinded his eyes. He stumbled backward. Beall followed up, hammering home a hard blow to the head. Pistonlike, his knotted fists rammed Curt to the wall.

But then Beall swung a wild left.

Curt ducked and slid inside the giant's guard. His right hand sank wrist-deep in the soft belly. Beall doubled up in the way of a pile-driving uppercut. There was a sharp, staccato crack, like the crisp report of a rifle. Beall's huge frame quivered, swayed away from Curt's hard knuckles. All at once he sprawled face forward to the floor.

Curt wiped his arm across his bleeding mouth and staggered to the rear door. He looked out over the range, then came back into the room. Painfully, he dragged Beall outside to the yard, returned once more and carried the long-limbed gent to the saddle of the horse at the corral. With a small coil of rope he lashed the man across the saddle.

At the watering trough, Curt filled a tin bucket and sloshed its contents over Beall. The shock of the cold water brought the burly rancher grogily alive.

Curt stared down at him and his voice ran cold.

"I'll tellin' yuh again, Beall. This is my ranch. Get out an' stay out!"

Beall heaved himself to his feet. He strayed drunkenly across the yard

to his horse, standing docilely beside the animal carrying the wounded man. Somehow Beall lifted himself into the saddle.

Savage fury cleared his brain, whitened the long scar on his cheek.

"Mason, I'll see yuh again. When I do, I'll kill yuh. Dawn ain't gonna be big enough to hold the both of us."

A hard smile across his bleeding mouth was Curt's answer. He stood in the yard, his legs braced wide apart, making certain that Beall, leading the other horse, moved off.

CHAPTER II

Night Raid!

LATE the next morning, Curt peered across the rolling plain. Dust rolled up a heavy cloud and a hot wind from the far-off desert beyond the buttes whirled it nearer. With it came the faint bawling of cattle.

Curt's battered face smoothed to a smile. Steers milled toward the meadow. A handful of riders hazed them up the high pastures enclosed by a rambling, broken line fence.

A light-haired, wild-eyed man spurred his piebald pony away from the range and approached Curt. Behind him loped a tall, lanky, red-headed hombre riding loosely in the saddle of a sleek roan.

The light-haired chap flung out his arms in a wide, carefree gesture.

"There they are, Curt. Every last one o' them. Three thousand head, all told."

"Any trouble, Jed?" Curt asked.

"Not a bit," answered Jed Lance. His eyes were suddenly serious. "We did come across a bunch o' riders drivin' a herd o' Herefords across yore upper range about two hours back. They were tough lookin' coyotes an' they were movin' as fast as them steers would go."

The red-headed gent had been staring at Curt's puffed lips, at the ugly bruise on his right cheek.

"What happened to you?" he broke in.

"Things are startin', Ki," acknowledged Curt wryly. Briefly, he outlined what had happened since his return to Dawn, concluding with the warning he had issued to Brad Beall about removing his cattle.

Carrot-topped Ki Karton whistled. "The jasper shore scares easy. Reckon

that beatin' yuh gave him made him think twice about tryin' to swipe yore spread."

"No!" responded Curt. "Beall ain't the type that scares. He's playin' a waitin' game. Shore he took his cattle offa my range. But he still wants it. I figger he'll wait a few days, then drop down an' raid us. When he does, I'll be ready."

Ki's lantern-jawed face hardened.

"Glad I'll be around when the shootin' starts," he said grimly.

"Yuh think this polecat, Beall, drygulched yore old man?" Jed rasped.

Curt stared soberly at him.

"Mebbe. I'm waitin' to make shore."

Talk was ended abruptly by the other riders coming in from the range. The men started toward the bunkhouse that stood near the pole corral. Curt called them back.

"There are only seven of us," he stated simply. "Guess we can all bunk in the house." He turned to a big, burly fellow with large ears that extended well away from his ruddy cheeks. "Chris, I reckon yuh're elected to rustle up grub as usual."

The big fellow grinned and stomped inside. Curt faced his sober-visaged crew.

"Tomorrow we repair the line fence. At night we split up. Three of us'll ride herd till midnight. The rest ride till dawn."

The next afternoon, while Jed, Ki, and the other Mason punchers were out on the range repairing line fences, a high buckboard wagon rumbled along the curving road from town. It rattled up the road toward the Mason ranch.

Curt stood indolently, watching the buckboard's steady approach. Dust flew up in the wake of creaking wheels and hung lazily in the windless air.

The man holding the reins was narrow, wiry and strictly unsmiling. He wore a broad-brimmed hat pushed well back on his small head, under which a clump of iron-gray hair strung out loosely. Even at that distance Curt glimpsed the eyes, small and piercing.

BESIDE the man sat a slender, lithe girl, her body swaying with the jerking motion of the buckboard. The dark glory of her hair, the proud way she held herself, captured Curt's attention and held it. Then the wagon was abreast of him and the man was speaking, his pale bloodless lips barely moving.

"So yuh came back, Mason." He regarded Curt with taciturn interest.

Evenly, Curt returned the older man's cool inspection.

"Hello, Fenton," he said casually.

"You might say hello to me, too, Curt." This new voice was soft and gentle, feminine, with a strangely personal warmth.

Curt turned slowly. Almost reluctantly he lifted his eyes to the girl.

"Elaine!" was all he could gasp.

Elaine Fenton looked squarely at Curt. Her lips made a faint sweet line in smiling. Her eyes, shadowed deeply by dark, curving lashes, were searching his sun-browned face and were puzzled.

"The years have changed you, Curt," she said.

He nodded, smiling faintly. "A man grows."

For the first time Curt really looked at her. He was startled by her beauty. There was ripeness in her lips, in every line of her graceful figure. From an awkward, gangling girl of sixteen, Elaine Fenton had developed into a young woman, lovely and vibrant.

Dan Fenton stirred restlessly.

"Mason, yuh're a fool," he stated bluntly. Curt raised speculative eyes toward the older man. "Take my advice an' get out of Dawn."

"Yuh're the third man to tell me that since I got back." Curt's face took on a drawn, quick-tempered turn. "I'm gettin' plumb tired of it."

Fenton held the reins in lean, bony

fingers. There was an angular hardness, a taut energy about this man. It showed in the narrowing intensity of his eyes, in the dry rustle of his voice.

"Yuh're here to find out who drygulched yore dad. Whoever that hombre is, yuh want to kill him. Right?"

"Right!" snapped Curt, so swiftly that Elaine drew in her breath.

"Curt!" she protested huskily.

Curt glared at Fenton, not hearing Elaine's muffled exclamation. Anger had its way with him, settling on his face, leaving it darker than it had been.

"They bushwhacked my father, took the cattle. They left my mother with a broken heart an' nothin' to look forward to but death. She's found that, now." His voice sank murderously and his lids narrowed. "Well, I'm a Mason an' I'm back to kill them that killed. Nobody is gonna drive me offa this spread. Are yuh satisfied? That's what yuh wanted to hear, ain't it?"

An ironic smile that was more an amused leer, pulled down the corners of Fenton's mouth.

"It's what I expected. All yuh'll get for yore trouble is a stomach full o' lead."

"Oh, no, Dad!" cried Elaine. "How can you say that!" She turned to Curt. "Curt, you must go away. You'll be killed like—"

"There's a blood debt to be paid," he answered ruthlessly.

Elaine's dark eyes flashed. Bitterness crept into her voice.

"When you talk like that I feel I don't know you. Oh, Curt, why can't you forget about your revenge? What good can all this killing do?"

"Tom Mason is dead. The jasper that killed him don't deserve to live."

"Mason, yuh're buckin' somethin' that's too big for one man," Dan Fenton broke in bruskly. "That's where yore father made his mistake. Yuh'll lose everythin' like Tom Mason did."

Without another word, the gaunt, unsmiling rancher took up the reins, flicked them over the rump of the big bay in the traces. The buckboard swung around. Elaine held Curt in view. There was deep hurt in her eyes, but she said nothing.

The buckboard creaked through the heat haze and rumbled off toward the road. Curt stood motionless in the yard, watching, until the wagon rolled into a dip in the road.

NIGHT came swiftly, once the sun had dropped behind the distant peaks in a shower of crimson glory. Fusing clouds shadowed the far-off buttes and moved across the night sky. Darkness was on the land, but a lamp moved in the Mason corral.

The three punchers Curt had singled out saddled up their horses, mounted and rode out of the yard. Curt watched them head toward the distant upland pasture, then turned to Jed Lance.

"Come on. Let's get some shuteye."

Jed and the others greeted the suggestion with hollow grunts of assent. There was no talk in these grim, silent men. They went to their low, flat cots and flung themselves down fully dressed.

Night's stillness shrouded the ranchhouse. Within ten minutes there was no other sound save the heavy, labored breathing of weary men.

The rattle of distant gunfire pulled Curt wide awake. He had no idea how long he had been asleep. But the blast of those guns jerked him into immediate action. He leaped up, the other punchers joining him in one bound.

They raced to the rear door. Far up the slope of the meadow orange blobs of flame pierced the blackness.

"Looks like Ki an' the boys have struck trouble," said Curt harshly. "Come on, we're ridin'. I reckon this is the raid I've been waitin' for. Chris," he ordered the burly cookie,

"you stay here an' sorta keep an eye on things. We're ridin' up there to see what's what."

Without waiting for a reply, he led a wild dash to the corral. The three men swung into their saddles, galloped toward the rising din of sound.

The frantic bawling of frightened cattle came to them on the wings of a rising wind. Guns bellowed distantly, moving off. Curt dug in his spurs, streaking across the meadow.

Ahead, the grim tide of battle was surging toward the mesa trail. Pounding hoofs shook the hard earth. Men shouted and cursed above the staccato roar of six-guns. Dust, stirred up by the stampeding herd, choked the night air.

Through the gloom, Curt could see a trio of riders climbing a steep shoulder of ground. That would be Ki and the other two Mason hands. Their guns blasted into the darkness. The leaden challenge was returned by other riders at the rear of the running herd.

Curt, Jed and Buck sliced the distance between the other Mason riders and themselves to a mere hundred yards. They took the first slope of the road in a fierce leaping charge and poured down the spur on the far side. The trail dragged up and down like that, then swung betwen two low, outcropping bluffs.

Curt pulled abreast of Ki Karton. "They've got a big bunch pullin' this raid," Ki yelled. "This is the rear guard we're fightin'. Another bunch is up ahead, drivin' the cattle toward the mesa."

"All right," said Curt grimly, eyes glittering. "We'll give 'em all we got. I've been achin' to get a crack at the coyotes who planted my old man. An' I'm bettin' this gang knows somethin' about that."

The trail narrowed and threaded sharply upward. It carried over a long spur and dipped down again. They shoved headlong through a brush-choked draw and found themselves deep in a rolling swale. Midway toward the towering cliffs, at its far end, a cut-bank arroyo knifed across the terrain.

Ahead of them, the moving flare of gunfire ceased. The dim shapes of the cattle thieves dropped out of sight. Bolting across the uneven ground, Curt suddenly hauled up sharply on the reins.

"Get back to cover," he rapped out. "They're holin' up in the arroyo!"

CHAPTER III

A Sidewinder Speaks Up

AS Mason spoke, guns blasted from the dry bed of the stream. A bullet sent Curt's hat spinning off his head. Another screamed by—into a *thud* of lead hitting human flesh. The rider behind him grunted and went limp.

It was Buck. Jed Lance spurred up in time to keep the stocky puncher in the saddle. In one motion, they spun about and raced for the meager protection of boulders against the circling ridge.

Behind outcroppings of rock, the Mason riders swung off their mounts. Quickly they settled down to swapping lead with the men in the arroyo. Unable to see the cattle thieves, Curt and the others had to be content with blasting away at the occasional bursts of flame that lighted the chunky blackness.

Bullet after bullet ricocheted off the rocks, sending splinters of loose shale into their faces. While they fired away, Curt was conscious of a sense of impatience. The longer they stayed camped behind the rocks, the farther away the cattle were being taken. Anxiety drove him to a frenzy.

"Jed!" he shouted. "This is gettin' us nowhere. That bunch in the ar-

royo is holdin' us off to make a clean break with my steers. Then they'll blow. We've gotta rush 'em."

"Yuh'll walk into a hail o' lead," grunted Jed.

"An' I'll be throwin' a hail o' lead," stated Curt.

Jed blew a long breath through his teeth.

"If yuh go," he said, shaking his head sadly, "count me in."

None of the other punchers said anything. But immediately the tall, muscular shape of Ki Karton detached itself from the protection of an adjoining hunk of granite. Behind him came Guy Norton and Sam Weed.

Curt crouched to the ground. He held out his ivory-studded Colts. Sinisterly, the hammers clicked back. Racing low out of cover, he led the mad assault.

Hot tongues of flames spat through the night between the draw and the arroyo. Lead battered into Ki. A cry started from his lips, was instantly stilled as he collapsed. Curt's gun barked at a dull shape rearing cautiously over the lip of the arroyo. The shape tottered and fell.

Curt went charging straight ahead. A bullet plowed a shallow furrow in his shoulder. He ran on, a black, darting target. Vaguely, he saw two men stagger up from the dry bed of the narrow basin and spill. Beside him, Jed Lance, Guy Norton and Sam Weed were emptying belching guns toward the bank.

Weapons snarled on their right. Lead whistled close. Curt fired toward the stabbing dots of flame. His guns grew hot in his hands.

A man clambered out of the arroyo, his six-shooter swinging up in a swathe of yellow fire. He squeezed the trigger in swift aim. The click of a hammer striking an empty cylinder made Curt smile narrowly.

But he brought up his own weapons —and they were empty!

With a shove he threw the man backward, gained striking distance for his good arm, lashed out for the chin. The man dropped like a felled tree.

Four riders whipped out of the arroyo and pounded away, firing wildly as they fled. Then three others flashed out.

Furiously, the Masons shot at the retreating shapes. Gunfire blasted again and again, dwindling rapidly into the distant sound of scudding hoofs, then only the low murmur of the rising wind.

"We licked 'em," blurted Jed, passing a broad arm across his forehead.

Curt shook his head and stumbled toward a motionless form sprawled full-length on the ground.

"I reckon they could've slaughtered us if they wanted to," he said defeatedly. "They lit out 'cause they figgered the others had gotten clean away with the steers."

Curt knelt beside the still figure. Striking a match, he cupped the flame in steady hands. The face of Ki Karton, gray with the agony of slow, bleeding death, was etched in the lurid glow.

"Done for," muttered Curt, thin-lipped. He rose slowly. With Jed's aid, he strapped Ki across a saddle.

The grim, dusty faces of Guy Norton and Sam Weed, supporting the bowed shape of Buck the wounded puncher, rode close. Curt and Jed, with the body of Ki between them, led toward the mouth of the draw. Sadly, silently the funeral procession headed back to the Mason spread.

DAWN found Curt following the wide broken trail of the stolen cattle. It led over climbing rangeland that knifed steadily upward toward the mesa. Deep-gouged peaks thrust jagged edges into the sky along the higher reaches.

Curt was alone. Jed had wanted to go along, but he and the others were needed at the ranch to guard what little stock remained after the raid.

An hour of steady riding carried

him into wilder country. The trail of cattle was still sharply defined. Curt had no trouble following it over sage flats. It was a broad trail, massed with the sign of many hoofprints.

The white ball of the sun swung higher. Curt shifted his weight in the saddle and urged the big bay to a swifter gait. A stone rattled over hard ground behind him.

Curt strained to quick, uneasy attention. He whirled, going for his gun.

"Yore smoke-pole'll be safe where it is," grated the harsh voice of Gil Pate, Brad Beall's foreman. He rode out from behind a dense thicket,

crowding the shoulder of a low ridge to Curt's rear. His hand gripped a long-barreled Colt.

No change stirred Curt's emotionless features. His hands rose slowly above his head. He turned on the man a glance that was utterly cool.

"Ride!" ordered Pate tersely. "Beall will want to see yuh!"

The bay leaped forward under the prodding pressure of Curt's spurs. Pate trotted on behind.

"Don't go fannin' for yore gun, Mason," he warned. "Yuh're a perfect target at this range. I could put a pair o' bullets in yore back before yore iron cleared leather."

Curt grinned coldly. "That's about yore speed, Pate, pluggin' gents in the back."

Pate mouthed an angry oath and prodded Curt's back with the barrel of his six-shooter. "Keep goin', hombre, 'fore I plug yuh here an' now."

Curt and his captor jogged across a short stretch of dry meadow, then broke into a rocky trail that ran west to the crest of a ridge. Along the rim they rode, until it dropped down to the lush floor of a valley. Amid the welter of low-lying hills a frame house, grayed by wind, rain and sun, stood out in a grove of trees.

They cantered into the yard, came around to the front porch and dismounted. Pate prodded Curt with his gun again. Curt stamped up the steps and strode across the veranda. Out of the tail of his eye he noted two horses tethered to a rangy poplar at the far side of the house.

He walked swiftly into the big front room. Brad Beall shoved his great bulk out of a chair and grinned. One side of his face was still bruised and swollen from their fight.

A SHORT man with bowed legs and close-set eyes peered intently at Beall. The latter tilted his shaggy eyebrows a trifle. A signal had passed between those two. Curt did not miss it. The short man sidled off, taking up his station by a window. Pate remained in the doorway.

Curt glanced carefully about, his mind registering every detail—particularly the unprotected window fronting the veranda.

"What brung yuh here, Mason?" inquired Beall with a leer.

Arms above his head, Curt faced Beall and the little man, his blood running high with mounting fury.

"Yuh don't have to ask that, Beall. Where are my steers?"

Beall smiled dangerously. "What makes yuh think I stole yore damned cattle?"

"I just figger it that way."

The big rancher's heavy brows drew together. He hooked his thumbs in his crossed gunbelts and rocked back on his heels.

"All right, I'll tell yuh," he snarled. "Yuh won't live long after I tell yuh, anyway."

"That's interestin'," remarked Curt dryly.

"Thought yuh'd find it so. Yuh may be surprised, Mason, but I didn't take yore cattle."

"No? Then, who did?"

"The same hombre who bushwhacked yore old man."

"Yeah? Who is that?" rasped Curt skeptically. "Talk fast, Beall!"

"Dan Fenton!"

Strange glints came into Curt's hard eyes. "Yuh're a lyin' polecate!"

"Easy, everybody!" a strangely familiar, husky voice ordered harshly.

Curt's eyes jumped to the front window. Beall's hand traveled toward his hip, halted. The little man at the end of the room froze.

Dan Fenton stood outside the window, a long-barreled six-gun gripped tight in his bony hand. His eyes were smoky with some bizarre, moving passion. At the doorway Pate started to lift his gun.

"Drop yore iron!" roared the gray-haired Fenton.

Pate slid a baleful glance toward Fenton but relinquished his weapon.

Fenton gave Curt a tight-lipped, morose smile.

"Beall wasn't lyin'," he said tautly. "I shot Tom Mason an' swiped his cattle."

Watching the older man with a keen, searching glance, Curt made no answer. There was something here he couldn't understand. Fenton's eyes were cold and defiant, yet they held something in their bleary depths akin to despair.

Dan Fenton laughed immoderately. "That surprises yuh, don't it?" He threw a leg over the low window sill and leaped into the room. Backed against the window, he faced the men in the room. There was no warmth in his gray, deep-lined face. "Well, here's another surprise. I also led the raid on yore beef last night!"

CHAPTER IV

Rustler's Redemption

YOUNG Curt maintained a stony silence, the set of his face hardening, his whole body growing taut.

Fenton hitched up his worn chaps. His voice droned on.

"Yeah, I killed yore father, Mason. It was durin' the big raid. Tom Mason got a bunch o' his cowpokes together an' followed my crowd to the mesa. We trapped 'em in a blind canyon an' wiped 'em out. I hunkered up behind yore father. He heard me an' started to turn but my guns were a sight too fast for him."

"What's the idea o' blabbin' out this yarn, Fenton?" Beall growled angrily. He let his arms dangle menacingly and took a step forward.

"Up with yore hands," snapped Fenton. "Yuh'll see why in a minute."

Furiously, Beall raised his hands high.

"Mason," resumed the old man, "yuh may not remember, but when the Masons an' the Fentons an' the Bealls first came to Dawn, times were hard. Nobody asked questions. Everybody took what they wanted. Once they got it, it was their job to hold on to it. Beall an' me liked yore dad's range. We got it. Then Beall spread out an' decided he wanted the range all to himself. He wanted more cattle, too."

"So?" grated Curt.

"I been seein' to it that he got the cattle."

Curt's mouth drew down and his eyes glinted dangerously.

"Fenton," he gritted through clenched teeth. "In a little while I'm gonna go fannin' for my gun. I come back to get the sidewinder that bushwhacked Tom Mason. Seein' yuh've

laid yore cards on the table, I'm about ready to try my luck."

"Shut up an' keep yore hands still," snapped Fenton, gnarled hand steady, gray eyes rocklike. "If I wanted to, I could drill yuh right here an' now." Suddenly his face lost its pale intensity and something went out of his voice, leaving it dull and dreary. "Yeah, I oughta be proud o' myself with all my thievin' an' the killin', but I ain't.

"I ain't never forgotten Tom Mason's killin'. Its lived with me till I'm sick of it. An' you, Beall, yuh thievin' buzzard, yuh've held that drygulchin' over my head ever since. I been tryin' to live respectable on account o' Elaine, but yuh won't let me. Yuh've threatened to let the whole valley know about Tom Mason if I ever quit yuh."

Beall laughed thinly. "How long do yuh figger I'm gonna listen to this tripe?"

"Until I've finished," Fenton said quietly, but with infinite deadliness. "For five years yuh've made me do yore dirty work, Beall. I've rustled cattle for yuh until I'm plumb sick of it. Now I'm quittin' yuh cold."

"No, yuh're not. Try an' pull out."

"Try an' keep me in," replied Fenton. He swung a razor-edged glance toward Curt. "I'm gonna help yuh get yore beef back. The herd is waitin' in a natural basin up beyond the mesa until Beall gets ready to haze 'em to Shipton. I reckon it's about time I did somethin' decent."

"I don't want yore help," shot back Curt gruffly. Somehow his tone carried no conviction. Something in the bold, lonely stand of Fenton against the hostile forces in the room moved him.

Here was the man who had killed his father. This was the man he should drill with hot lead. Dazedly, Curt realized he no longer wanted to kill. Revenge had suddenly lost its appeal. The jarring fact angered him. Yet the feeling persisted. Was it because of Elaine and the hurt look in her eyes when she had begged him to abandon his idea of revenge? Or was it some sudden change in himself?

HE NEVER answered the question to his own satisfaction. Beall's harsh voice cut the still, tense air of the room.

"Pate! You fool! What're yuh waitin' for? Drill him!"

Fenton wheeled quickly toward Beall's heavy-set foreman, already fishing out another gun. Pate's arm came sliding up and flame spurted from the barrel of his weapon. Fenton fired at the same time. Pate stiffened, twisted slowly, and spun to the floor. Fenton dropped his gun and both hands went clawing for his side.

While Pate's arm was still on the upswing, Curt's gleaming Colt cleared leather. The crash of his shot made a single report of the three explosions. His gun half out of the holster, the little man by the rear window sagged, a look of pained surprise on his thin, pinched face. He fell against the wall as Beall raced for the window and plunged through in a crazy head-first dive. Curt saw him go but his only target was the flashing soles of Beall's boots.

He strode quickly to Fenton, who was struggling weakly to his feet. A splotch of crimson stained his shirt, spreading rapidly. Pain deepened the grayness of his face. Curt stooped and gave him the gun he had weakly dropped.

"Why don't yuh kill me?" Fenton demanded tonelessly.

"I don't know," Curt said bluntly. "Mebbe because I never kick anybody that's down." He paused. "An' mebbe because I don't want to kill yuh."

Fenton blinked his eyes. They were misty. He staggered to the door, supporting himself against the wall. Curt sprang to his side.

"Where yuh goin'?"

"I told yuh I was goin' to get yore steers."

"Yuh're stayin' here. Yuh can't move with that wound."

"Yuh're crazy," said Fenton thickly, moving forward in a reeling, stumbling gait. "Got to go. . . . Never find 'em unless I show yuh. . . . Hidden in natural basin. . . ."

Curt laid a firm hand on his shoulder to hold him back but Fenton thrust him aside. Outside, the old rancher staggered to his horse. He steadied himself, waved a hand toward the mesa.

"My men already up there . . . sent them hour ago. . . . Beall will try to get cattle away. . . . My men have orders. . . . Stop him. . . ."

Somehow, Fenton managed to swing up into the saddle. Curt raced to the bay and joined him. Together they left the yard and clattered off for the hills like a pair of streaks.

The red stain covering Fenton's shirt was swiftly blossoming. His body jerked and bounced to the movement of his spirited stallion. Each stride wrenched new agony out of him. But he kept his lips clamped shut.

As they galloped into a gentle swale and swerved up through a narrow pass at the far end, the pound of hoofs rattled behind him. Curt pulled up, whipping his Colt. Around a curve in the trail swept Elaine, her dark hair flying. Behind her came the three Mason riders—Jed, Sam and Guy.

"Dad! Where are you going?" Elaine gasped. Instantly she saw the bloodstained shirt. "Dad, you're hurt! You've been shot!"

FENTON stared vaguely at the girl as if he did not recognize her. Curt drew aside.

"We got restless back at the ranch, so we decided to hit the trail for the mesa an' see what was what," Jed explained, squinting under the sun's scorching disk in the cloudless sky.

"Yuh're just in time, I reckon," Curt answered grimly. "Fenton is gonna show us where the cattle are holed up."

"How does he come to know?" Guy queried, suspicion riding his tone.

Curt explained briefly in an undertone, so the girl, at her father's side, could not hear.

"Yuh trust him?" demanded Jed after a short, tense silence.

"We'll have to." Curt looked beyond Jed toward the higher rises of the mesa. He spoke in a low tone. "Why did yuh bring Elaine back here?"

"She wouldn't stay back," Jed told him gruffly. "Met her about a mile along the trail. She wanted to know where we were headed an' we told her we were lookin' for yuh. Reckon we looked kinda grim an' worried about yuh an' she insisted on comin' along."

Curt nodded intently, then went back to the girl. Elaine was pleading with her father not to go on, to let her tend to his wound. Fenton trotted forward, refused to listen.

She turned to Curt, her voice trembling on the narrow border of panic.

"Why don't you stop him?" she cried in horror.

"He insists on showing me where my stolen cattle have been taken."

Overwhelmed by the haunting fear that gripped her, Elaine did not wonder how her father might know where the cattle were. Instead, she called frantically at Fenton's retreating back.

"Dad, you can't go! Do you hear!"

Fenton growled and swung his gun up. He waved it back at Curt and the three astonished riders behind him. His voice reached them thickly. His eyes were not altogether clear.

"I'm goin' to the mesa. Rest o' yuh can stay here if yuh want."

Curt recoiled at the sudden, desperate set of Elaine's cheeks. "All right," she said. "I'm going, too."

And that was that. There was no time for argument, though, he warned her that there would be more shooting. It had no effect. Curt shrugged

and motioned to his three riders. Abruptly, the little party rushed toward Fenton at a ground-eating pace, shooting up and out of the pass.

After an hour of hard riding over rocky ground, past low, overhanging cliffs, with Fenton growing weaker and barely able to go on, they swung into a narrow gorge.

Fenton took the lead as the defile narrowed, forcing them to pick their way carefully. The three riders from Curt's outfit strung along behind.

ROCKY, bush-covered slopes rose on both sides of them. Suddenly around a bend in the trail, they trotted past an opening concealed behind a great pinnacle of rock. Even Fenton charged by it before he pulled his horse to a sliding stop. He slumped forward in the saddle, coughing weakly.

Heatedly refusing aid, Dan Fenton wheeled his horse back to the break in the granite wall. They poured through the narrow aperture and raced along another gorge which quickly splayed out. Before Curt was aware of it, they had thundered into a great bowl-shaped arena. The floor of the basin was covered with lush, waving grass. From a pocket under a cliff a clear spring welled.

Fenton halted them behind a dense thicket and peered about carefully. Curt's eyes widened as he noted the rich fodder springing up from the floor of the basin—fodder enough for all the cattle on the range. Then, looking toward the far end of the arena, he saw a milling band of Hereford steers. Mason steers! He was sure of it. Two thousand of them, at least.

Watching the clear cold water flowing out from under the cliff, feeding the green grass, he realized that Beall could keep herds of stolen cattle holed up in the basin for any length of time before pushing them across the desert to Shipton, the next railway shipping point.

And, looking toward the basin's wide western entrance, he knew the steers had been hazed in from that end. Some other hidden trail led to that opening. Fenton had really taken a short cut to come in from the eastern side.

The harsh bellow of guns broke the stillness. A band of riders raced in from the distant open mouth of the arena.

"My riders!" choked Fenton, swaying feebly in the saddle.

Another group of horsemen was hazing the big herd toward the arena entrance. Jed let out an angry snort.

"There's that polecate, Beall. I'd like to take a pot-shot at him just to give him a taste o' lead."

"Easy does it," warned Curt. "There'll be plenty o' time for shootin'."

Below them, Beall's gunmen suddenly whirled as Fenton's riders swept toward them. Guns crashed. Steers bawled in panic and drummed toward Fenton's men.

The horsemen swung wide around the herd and surged toward the canyon wall. Beall's hands abandoned their mounts and took to the shelter of the rocks, firing as they scuttled for cover.

Curt slid off his horse.

"Dismount!" he yelled. "From now on we can do better on foot."

He ran to Elaine and helped her to the ground. Fenton, meanwhile, half-fell and half-climbed down from his saddle. Curt slapped the stallion's flank and the horse skittered off down the trail, followed by the other animals.

"Mebbe we can give Beall a little surprise party," said Curt grimly. "We'll have to hole up behind those boulders below us."

Stumbling and slipping over the uneven ground, they scrambled off the ledge, down the slope to several huge rocks jutting out from the canyon's shallow sides. Fenton could barely stand, but his thin mouth was set

firmly. He drew his six-gun. Jed brought Sam Weed and Guy Norton to another stubby granite crag several rods to the right and below the others.

Beall's crew was scrambling up the incline toward them. Then, from the arena floor, came a fresh volley of shots as Fenton's hands spilled from their saddles and raced to the rocks, slinging lead at the running shapes above them.

CHAPTER V

War to the End

FENTON'S shaggy head cleared the boulder's side. He cut loose with his iron at the running figure of a man below him. The bullet must have crashed into the man, for he was knocked off balance. He staggered and fell sideways, rolled down the slope until his body struck an outcropping rock.

Simultaneously, Jed and the two Mason hands began discharging a deadly hail of lead into the rocks and bushes that sheltered Beall's crew sixty yards away.

Elaine stood up, a small pistol in her hand. The weapon bucked and smoke curled from the short barrel. Guns roared dead ahead. Bullets chipped flinty pieces of rock into her face.

Curt whirled, facing the girl.

"Stay here," he directed tersely. "I'm movin' off behind that boulder on yore left."

He indicated another smaller crag half hidden by a clump of mesquite. For an instant their eyes met and held, then he turned away.

Crouched low, he darted over the rough ground. A bullet whipped up dust at his feet. Another bounced off the rock toward which he was headed, but no lead stopped his crouching rush.

To the boulder's far side he ran, scanning the bushes. Quickly he turned, fired at smoke pluming out from a low chunk of granite. A furtive movement to his left told him that someone was trying to flank him. He dropped to the ground as a gun exploded. Lead ricocheted off the rock above his head. As he hit the ground and rolled over, he drilled a shot toward a spout of flame behind a mass of sumac.

Then, not ten yards away, he saw the gaping muzzles of two revolvers and the leering face behind them. He lurched to one side, his gun belching fire. A hot searing pain streaked along his left thigh. At the same instant, his foe pitched to the ground, chest torn by a fiery slug.

The sporadic firing of Beall's crew raged closer now. Hard-pressed by the surge of Fenton's men below, the cattle thieves were trying to scale the slope and reach the ledge for a getaway.

Curt's glance shifted to the boulder that sheltered his three riders. They were firing as fast as their fingers could pull the triggers. Then, he saw a rustler sneaking forward under cover. His gun blasted. The drygulcher's big body jerked as a slug shattered his neck. His chin dropped to his chest and jounced down the slope.

Suddenly, from a protected spot on Curt's right, Elaine's high-pitched scream rose. The sound snapped his attention to the low rock shielding the girl and her father. He saw Dan Fenton drop his gun, hands at his chest where another bullet had torn into him. This time the rancher collapsed without a struggle. Elaine ran to him, picked up his head and cradled it against her breast.

A surge of recklessness electrified Curt's nerves. He straightened and limped fiercely across the intervening space. Six-guns smashed lead past his

face. Heat scorched the lobe of his left ear and fresh blood dripped down his sweat-streaked face.

BUT he reached Elaine. Her eyes were swimming with tears. Great sobs racked her lithe, slender frame.

"He's dying. I know it!" she cried, rocking the gray head in her arms.

Curt dropped to his knees. He peered at the fresh wound smearing Fenton's reddened shirt. He shook his head gravely. Fenton's eyes were going glassy. His mouth trembled open.

"Mason?" he mumbled faintly.

"Yeah?" queried Curt in a strangely quiet tone.

Fenton made a feeble motion toward Elaine. She raised puzzled eyes to Curt. Gesturing silently toward the far end of the rock, he took the heavy burden from her arms. She stumbled to her feet and moved frightened but obedient.

A rattling breath gasped out of Fenton. Pain drained his face, cut deeper the sharp lines around his eyes.

"Mason!" he whispered. "Elaine—she doesn't know about me an'—yore old man—an' all the thievin'. She thinks—"

Curt's head lowered. His hard mouth softened. Something strayed into his eyes that had not been there before.

"If it'll make it any easier for yuh," he said gently, "I didn't hear a thing about yuh an' yuh didn't tell me anythin'."

Fenton stared up at Curt, the strain slowly leaving his face.

"Thanks," he gasped. "Don't deserve it nohow but—"

The voice broke off. Curt peered quickly at the agonized, sun-bronzed face in his arms. He pulled off his Stetson, bunched it in a knot and pillowed the old man's head on it.

Elaine rushed over, grief tearing at her. One look at Curt and she knew the answer to her fears. But she was dry-eyed now as she bent to the motionless figure on the ground. Curt, strangely moved, lurched off.

Down the slope a loud yell suddenly went up. The bellow of guns ceased as abruptly as it had begun. Curt peered out from behind the boulder. Beall's gunmen had surrendered and were being herded back to the canyon floor by Fenton's riders.

Jed and Guy found there was nothing they could do for Sam Weed, whose neck had been broken by a bullet. They slid down the slope to join the Fenton crowd.

Curt's shoulders hunched forward. Relief further sapped his weary frame. Sighing, he turned back to Elaine. One limping step he took, and froze at the clatter of slipping rocks off to his left. The hulking figure of a man leaped to shelter behind a granite crag. Curt whirled. He didn't need to see the man's face to know it was Brad Beall. He inched forward painfully over the sharp rocks and loose shale.

Beall climbed steadily. Curt followed more slowly, impeded by his wounded leg. Suddenly the big rancher reached the ledge, aimed his six-gun dead at Curt. The gun roared. Curt ducked. A slug zipped by harmlessly. Beall ran along the ledge. Curt made a fresh spurt for the brim. Beall stumbled over a jutting rock and spilled. By the time he regained his feet, Curt had closed the distance between them.

"Yuh'll never get away, Beall," Curt swore between gritted teeth.

BEALL'S gun lifted in a fast-moving arc. A triumphant grin twisted his scarred face. He squeezed the trigger. Curt lurched sideways, but there was no explosion, only the hollow metallic click of a hammer tripping down on an empty chamber.

"Tough luck, Beall," grated Curt, his lips a white, thin line. Pain fogged his eyes. He shook his head to clear it and limped nearer.

"Why don't yuh shoot, Mason?" demanded the burly sidewinder with a

sneer, his dark face betraying no fear.

"It can wait," Curt told him in a deadly tone. He whipped a six-gun from his left holster. "What do yuh say, Beall? Are yuh willin' to try yore hand on the draw with me?"

Beall's eyes narrowed. He smiled mirthlessly, the long scar on his cheek whitening.

"Shore. Why not?"

Curt tossed one of his Colts to the ground a few feet in front of the rancher.

"We'll start even," he declared. "When yuh pick up that iron, yuh can holster it an' we'll start from scratch." He winced against the bolting rush of pain and nausea through him. Watching intently, Beall grinned.

CURT straightened with an effort. Beall stood half-crouched. Curt returned his other gun to its holster. Slowly Beall's towering frame bent and he scooped up the six-gun. He swung up in a vivid flash of speed, the gun blaring in his hand.

Curt had expected just that. His gun blazed from his hip. No eye could match that flare of action.

But something slapped him back a step, cut viciously along his skull. Roaring filled his ears and he fought to stay erect. Dimly he saw Beall's mouth fly open, but no cry came forth. For what seemed a long time, the big rustler bent like a dry reed in a strong breeze, then he fell flat on his face.

Curt staggered to his victim's side, removed the gun from the stiffening fingers. Weakly he started back down the slope toward Elaine, sliding and lurching in the loose shale. Twice he caved to the ground. The second time he barely struggled to his feet. His head throbbed and fire danced in his blurring eyes.

He moved on, hardly conscious of where he was going. He felt his legs buckle. Then pressure met his shoulders and steadied him. Some of his ebbing strength flowed back. He saw Elaine beside him, her arms supporting part of his weight.

The girl's drawn, worried face tilted.

"Curt! Are you all right?" she breathed. "When I heard the shots and saw you up there, I thought you would be—"

"What did you think, Elaine?" Curt demanded eagerly, not letting her finish.

Impulsively her arms went about his neck. Her lips crushed against his mouth and for a moment a strange ecstasy swept them.

At last, her hands pushed him gently away. Curt gazed at her steadily and his eyes were tender.

"You were right about revenge an' killin'," he murmured gently. "It took me a spell to find out, though. What happened five years ago to Dad is past. I reckon the past can stay where it is."

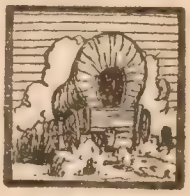
(Continued on Page 109)

The HOME CORRAL

A DEPARTMENT FOR READERS

CONDUCTED BY

OLD DOC TRAIL



HOWDY, hombres an' hombresses! Feels mighty fine to be perchin' on the Home Corral fence with you folks again, talkin' over what we've seen and done. And watchin' the days grow long again, as another summer peeks over the southern skyline.

What is your favorite season? It's spring, with most folks, or summer. Me, my pick is fall. I reckon it takes me back to my early days, when fall was more important to our ways o' living than it is now.

Fall was roundup and shipping season in the cow country, when all that a rancher had worked for through the year produced him some rewards. That was the season when worked slacked off on the range and the punchers started to celebrate. It was the season when the deer was fat and slick, up in the high country, and the call o' geese was in the sky, and a fire felt good o' mornings, and a man's blood ran faster, and his hoss did too.

Give Me Autumn

Yessir, folks, give me the fall out West. But then, it's all accordin' to what you've been brought up to. Just the other day I met up with an old gazabo who sighed like a foundered calf because it was sap time back where he came from.

He was a native-born Vermonter, this gent was. He got so wrapped up in his memories that he told me what spring was like back in the maple country.

Maple is a tree you don't see out West very much, though I often wondered why they hadn't been planted, and a flapjack larrup industry started. To sort o' bring the two together.

After this trail *compañero* o' mine got done, I found out that growin' maple syrup ain't as simple as cattle raising or leaning on a fence and watching field crops grow.

To begin with, this old Vermonter told me, a maple tree has to be about fifty years old before it's a good sap producer. And that most o' the trees they tap each spring up New England way are one or two centuries old!

A Maple Syrup Legend

Maple syrup, he claimed, was the most delicate and satisfying sweet that man ever discovered in a natural state. Indians taught the trick to the white settlers, a hundred years before the Revolutionary War. They had a legend, he let on, that they come onto the thing by accident.

Seems a mighty hunter brung in some moose meat, and his squaw hung it in a maple tree, where sap dripped on it from a tomahawk cut. She boiled that meat, until the gravy turned into a thick, brown

syrup. The mighty hunter took one bite, and decided that was about the best eatin' moose he'd ever tasted.

He spread the news around. So the tribe went at the maple trees, and presently found out that by boiling the sap down to a syrup that they could have sweet moose slumgow through the year.

The early white settlers made syrup in a good deal the same crude way o' the Indians, who hacked the trees, poked in bark troughs, and run it out into clay pots. Only the whites brung iron and copper kettles, and maple sugar was their substitute for white sugar, which was a luxury beyond reach o' most.

Sugar Weather

The season usually lasts from the middle of March to the middle of April, I found out, but the dates vary, accordin' to the weather. It begins with the first warm days o' spring, when the nights are still cold. It's the alternate freezing and thawing that makes "sugar weather," this Vermonter claimed.

Sometimes there comes a spell o' good runs, lasting from two to five days, and in such times the buckets fill fast, and they keep fires going far into the night to stay caught up with the run.

The average tree yields about 10 gallons of sap, which is evaporated down to about one quart o' syrup, or around two pounds o' sugar.

Experts can tell what section the syrup comes from, just from its taste, and the most flavorful syrup comes from Vermont, on account o' the rock formation, he told me. He had figgers to show that Vermont produces about 30 percent o' the maple

syrup, the rest coming mostly from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York and Maine. Though it's produced in 26 states, in all.

I always had the notion that robbing a tree o' sap had injurious effects on it, but my Vermonter *amigo*, he said that ain't so a-tall. They got actual records o' trees that've been producing since the days o' the Pilgrim Fathers.

It's Gone Modern

They don't do it the crude, Indian way no more, I found out. The maple syrup industry, it's gone modern, like most everything else, and they've got a pipeline system in some places, where the trees are hooked up like a flock o' oil wells, all sending their sap into one big reservoir, and from there into the evaporator.

The syrup is graded according to color, and marketing regulations are mighty strict. Light amber's the best, though for a long time folks suspected that maple syrup that wasn't dark and strong was adulterated. That was because in the old method o' evaporating it over open fires, the sap got scorched.

The trees are tapped about three feet from the ground, with a augur hole about two inches deep. A spile is drove in, the bucket is hung on it, and if the tree is a vigorous performer sometimes two tappings are made. On some o' the old trees are scars made with the tomahawks o' Indians that roamed the Green Mountains nobody knows how far back.

So the old Vermonter, his favorite season was the early spring, when the sap run was on, and it made him homesick because he was away from them rockbound hills of his native state.

Makes You Hungry

Corn, cane and the honey bee are the syrup-makin' rivals o' the Vermont maple, and now they're learning how to produce dextrose sugar out o' many varieties o' fruit, but genuine maple syrup is produced in such limited quantity that they don't ever worry about disposin' o' their crop.

Quebec, Canada, produces maple products, and Michigan and Ohio also. But experts say that the farther south maple syrup is produced, the flatter it gets. Whereas the farther north it comes from, the stronger. Vermont is located just right, and in back o' that is the mysterious chemistry which occurs on the marble and granite deep down.

Say, it makes you hungry to talk about it, hombres an' hombresses?

But it's still the smell of a brandin' fire out West that is more homelike to me than the smoulder o' birch bark under a sap kettle, though I'm dubious whether the singeing hair of a range calf makes as poetic a aroma as maple syrup. Not to most folks, anyhow.

(Continued on page 106)

Try this *cooler* SHAVING CREAM at our expense

•

20 SHAVES

FREE

We won't ask you to read a lot of weighty arguments aimed to convince you that Listerine Shaving Cream is superior to others. We'll rest our case on the cream itself. We want you to try it at our expense.

One little dab of it on the face, whipped into a cool, creamy lather, will do more to convince you of its merit than a whole page of arguments.

If twenty free shaves do not remove all doubts of its superiority, nothing will.

It has been our experience that when a man gives Listerine Shaving Cream a thorough trial, he rarely returns to other brands—good as they may be. Possibly you will be an exception. We hope not.

It costs you nothing to learn the secret of cooler, quicker shaving. Simply clip the coupon below and put it in the mail. Tear it out now before you forget it. In return for it, you will receive a generous trial tube of Listerine Shaving Cream—enough for at least twenty shaves.

When that tube is empty, you will probably want the regular size tube. What a whopper of a tube it is . . . containing at least 130 shaves! Some men get as much as 175. What a whale of a bargain at 35¢!

All drug counters have it, as well as the new Listerine Brushless Cream. LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO.

CLIP THE COUPON

LISTERINE SHAVING CREAM

20 SHAVES FREE

Lambert Pharmacal Co., Dept. 150, St. Louis, Mo.

Please send me free and postpaid your large sample tube of ☐ Listerine Shaving Cream; ☐ Listerine Brushless Cream. (Check whichever is desired.)

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____

Pile Sufferers! Attention

The McCleary Clinic, 397 Elms Blvd., Excelsior Springs, Mo., is putting out an up-to-the-minute book, everyone should have on this and related ailments. You can have a copy of this book by asking for it on a postcard sent to the above address. No charge. It may save you much suffering and money. Write today for a free copy.

WORLD'S LARGEST LABORATORY MAKING DENTAL PLATES ONLY!

We make FALSE TEETH that fit you *by mail* from *your* mouth impression. Thousands of satisfied customers. Money back guaranteed. Save ½ or more. Free mouth-forms, directions. Write U.S. DENTAL CO., Dept. 3-82, Chicago, Ill.

$6.85 to $35

FOLLOW THIS MAN

Secret Service Operator No. 38 is on the job! Running down dangerous Counterfeit Gang. Tells-tale finger prints in murdered girl's room.

Free *The Confidential Report Operator No. 38 made to his chief. Write for it.*

Earn a Regular Monthly Salary

You can become a Finger Print Expert at home, in your spare time, at small cost. Write for confidential free report and details. Literature will be sent only to persons stating their age.

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Ave.
Dept. 7963 Chicago, Ill.

FREE SUITS and GIFTS AS BONUS PLUS BIG PROFITS

Selling your friends fine quality, individually made to measure Suits and Topcoats at Amazing New LOW PRICES. No Extra Charge for latest Swing and Sport Styles. No Experience Necessary. Send for FREE Selling Outfit and FREE SUIT BONUS and other BONUS Offers.

JAY ROSE & CO 330 So. Wells, Dept. M-3 CHICAGO, ILL.

ASTHMA

WRITE FOR *FREE TRIAL OFFER!*

If you suffer from Asthma Paroxysms, from coughs, gasping, wheezing — write quick for daring FREE TRIAL OFFER of real relief. Inquiries from so-called "hopeless" cases especially invited. Write NACOR, 426-Z, State Life Building, Indianapolis, Ind.

Read Our Companion Magazine

MASKED RIDER WESTERN MAGAZINE

Now On Sale **10¢** At All Stands

(Continued from page 105)

It's odd how we get ourselves attached to smells. Sometimes I've wondered if I couldn't be took around the country blindfolded and tell purty near where I was at thataway.

One o' the most peculiar and lingerin' place-scents is desert greasewood right after a rain. Blooming sage also can fill the air with a perfume all its own. I've heerd that sailors can smell the Gulf Stream miles before they come onto it, on account o' the sargasso weed that floats a-growin' in it. But I reckon the big timber forests o' Oregon can be smelled just as far off.

Mesquite Odor

The mesquite land o' southwest Texas sure does identify itself mighty positive, too. The characteristic odor of a northern Mexico town is the mesquite wood which they use mostly for fuel. And there's no mistakin' a Columbia River Indian village in salmon-drying season.

You can smell the coal towns of Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia and a expert smeller can tell exactly the level of the tide in Delaware. A sheep range hangs onto its smell label for years after the last woolly is drove out of it. In a good Kansas grasshopper year, the pests can be scented for miles, specially by birds that make a business o' devouring 'em.

I've met up with gents who claim they can smell snow, and anybody who's followed a cattle herd knows that the dust in various parts has its own particular smell. Willows and cottonwood trees and alders tell a night traveler when he's approaching water.

Nowadays the smell o' automobile gases is stronger in settled parts than the in-

habitants realize. A month or two on the trails, far off from travelled roads, and you mighty quick know, once you return to the vicinity of a highway.

They say, in pioneer days, that Indians could smell railroad tracks for five miles. Sometimes the pioneers claimed they could smell the Indians just about as far. Bears can smell a berry patch farther than they can see and if you've lived in the mountains you know that blueberries and huckleberries fling off a lively scent when they ripen.

Rivers can be told sometimes from their smells. The Klamath, in northern California, smells o' the tules in the Klamath

THE NEW COLLEGE HUMOR 15c EVERYWHERE

Lake o' Oregon where that stream originates. In a windstorm you can smell the volcanic dust from another state. There's the saying about men who can smell money, but it's more'n a saying in mining districts where prospectors swear you can scent different minerals, copper being the smelliest.

A Smell Map

Mebbe the birds that fly over have a sort of smell map o' the U.S.A. which gift o' the senses would be real useful for aviators, I should reckon. And I once knowed a dry farmer in eastern Washington who claimed he could tell when they started threshing over in the next valley on account o' the wheat smell in the breeze.

A place-smell you never forget is the Pacific redwoods, close to the ocean, when a dripping fog climbs into their high tops. It's about the most invigoratin' natural ozone anywhere.

So every place and everything has its own smell brand. They tell me that mankind ain't ever invaded a realm that lacks a smell. Man, he can fly miles above the earth, into the clean and dustless stratosphere, but to do it he's got to wrap hisself up in the smell of an airplane. So he don't find out, after all, what a place minus a smell smells like.

I claim the best smell in all the world is mountain western pines. The worst, New Jersey's mud and manufacture flats. But it's all a matter o' taste. Many a old-time cowhand preferred the smell of a good, ripe barn to that of any house, though his favorite perfume was in the cookshack.

The Best of 'Em All!

The best smeller, out in the free and open country, that I ever met up with was a Sierra packer. He swore he could smell shade.

The funny part is, mebbe he could! For the moss that grows on the north or shady side o' rocks has a right pungent odor. Therefore, he likely was able to smell a canyon.

All this makes me recollect a bubbling spring in the Siskiyou Mountains o' northern California, the smell o' which kills birds an' insects which try to fly over, and if a man stands beside it too long he gets dizzy and is apt to fall in.

It's called a poison spring, but the water is clear and pure and harmless, no matter how much you drink.

The leathery, varnishy smell of a new buggy is something that'll stir a old-timer's memory to telling long-forgotten yarns. Saddle soap and mica axle grease and neatsfoot hoof dressing can stir up sentimental recollections, too, just like a whiff of a certain flavor o' perfume revives the heart throbs of a long-ago love.

(Continued on page 108)

Flush Poisons From Kidneys and Stop Getting Up Nights

Be Healthier, Happier — Live Longer

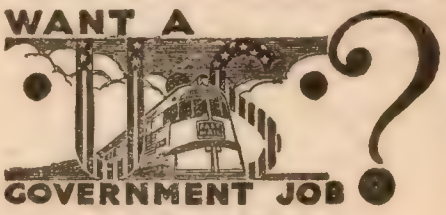
When you can get for 35 cents a safe, efficient and harmless stimulant and diuretic that should flush from your kidneys the waste matter, poisons and acid that are now doing you harm, why continue to break your restful sleep by getting up through the night?

Don't be an EASY MARK and accept a substitute—Ask for Gold Medal Haarlem Oil Capsules — right from Haarlem in Holland. GET GOLD MEDAL—the original—the genuine. Look for the Gold Medal on the box—35 cents.

Other symptoms of weak kidneys and irritated bladder may be backache, puffy eyes, shifting pains, burning or scanty passage. **Don't accept a substitute.**

INVENTORS

Small ideas may have large commercial possibilities. Write us for FREE book and Record of Invention form. Delays are dangerous in patent matters. Free information on how to proceed. Clarence A. O'Brien, Registered Patent Attorney, Dept. OC8, Adams Building, Washington, D. C.



START $1260 to $2100 Year

MEN—WOMEN

File Clerks
Postoffice Clerks-Carriers
Railway Postal Clerks
Customs Inspectors
Stenographers-Clerks
Many Other Jobs

GET READY IMMEDIATELY

Common Education Usually Sufficient

Mail Coupon TODAY SURE

COUPON

Franklin Institute
Dept. W-258,
ROCHESTER, N. Y.

Gentlemen: Rush to me, FREE of charge, list of U. S. Government big pay jobs. Send FREE 32-page book describing salaries, vacations, hours, work, etc. Tell me how to qualify for one of these jobs.

Name.....

Address.....

Be an ARTIST!

You Can Train at Home in Your Spare Time

The W. S. A. practical spare-time method has trained men and women of all ages since 1914. COMMERCIAL ART, CARTOONING, and DESIGNING all in one complete course. Trained Artists are capable of earning $30, $50, $75 a week. No previous Art experience necessary. FREE BOOK, "Art for Pleasure and Profit," describes course and TWO ART OUTFITS included. State age.

WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF ART, STUDIO 663-P, 1115—15th ST., N. W. WASHINGTON, D. C.

FREE BOOK gives details

Get this handsome instrument NOW. Here's How. Just send your name and address (SEND NO MONEY). **WE TRUST YOU** with 24 packs of Garden Seeds to sell at 10c a packet. When sold send $2.40 collected and **WE WILL SEND** this mahogany finish guitar and Five Minute Instruction Book absolutely **FREE.** Write for seeds **NOW.** A post card will do. Address:

LANCASTER COUNTY SEED COMPANY
Station 243. Paradise, Pennsylvania

THE TRUTH ABOUT

Stomach Ulcers

Caused by Gastric Hyperacidity

FREE Booklet on simple home treatment. Many report they were saved from expensive operations. Learn all about this amazing inexpensive home treatment. Pain relieved from the start. No rigid or liquid diet. This valuable booklet sent FREE with information as to guaranteed trial offer. **TWIN CITY VON CO., Dept. 209. Saint Paul, Minnesota.—Adv.**

TEAR GAS

100% Protection

A REAL SURE FIRE SELLER

Thugs and Thieves Beware!—Here is a regular 5 shot repeater which discharges 5 smothering clouds of Tear Gas in rapid succession to instantly Stop, Stun and Incapacitate the most vicious man or beast. A safe and effective substitute for dangerous firearms. NO PERMANENT INJURY. Needed in Stores, Banks, Autos and Homes everywhere to protect Life and Property. No skill required. Also Pencil Guns, Electric Shells, Riot Bombs, Fountain Pen Guns, Police Club Guns. All precision-built. NO TOYS. Every demonstration leads to a $3.00 to $8.00 sale, offering big profits. Handle our Tear Gas Equipment as a side-line and you'll soon give it full time. For a quick start, send $3.00 for complete demonstrator outfit consisting of an Automatic Pencil Gun with 10 demonstrators and 3 powerful Tear Gas cartridges, fully guaranteed.

FREE Blue Print showing how to install Electric Tear Gas Shells in Stores and Banks for hold-up and burglary protection, also Complete Sales Plan furnished with order or inquiry. **HAGEN IMPORT COMPANY, Dept. H-440, St. Paul, Minn.**

Follow the Exploits of Tony Quinn, the Nemesis of Crime, in

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Now On Sale **10¢** At All Stands

(Continued from page 107)

And how many remember the smell o' old-style black powder?

Well, folks, these memories o' old-fashioned days, they sometimes make a man sad, don't they? That's because our memory clings to the pleasant things, and the rest is forgotten. Looking back, it seems that life was purty near perfect. It wasn't, not anywhere.

Even in the most excitin' period o' western settlement, life was a purty dull proposition for days on end in the lonesome places. The strain was as hard on some as high-speed living is to others nowadays. Sheepherders went *loco*, and homesteaders got cabin fever, and cowpunchers got riproarin' drunk on paydays to break up the monotony.

Like the old pioneer who described the long winter nights:

"I just set and think, and sometimes I just set."

This here POPULAR WESTERN Magazine would o' brightened up life at many a ranch, only the writin' rannies would o' had to hold down to one-barrel words, because a lot o' Westerners didn't read or write much beyond their own names in the old days. Their main use for the alphabet was letterin' it on cow critters with brandin' irons.

Well, folks, I'm ridin' on—but I'll be back to see you in the next issue. *Hola.*

—OLD DOC TRAIL.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

Step up, hombres and hombresses—get ready for a big two-fisted gala issue of POPULAR WESTERN! The next number will feature another smashing Tom

OLD DOC TRAIL
POPULAR WESTERN
22 West 48th St., New York

Dear Doc: I'm plumb anxious t' be a member o' th' POPULAR WESTERN CLUB. Yere's who I am:

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

State .....Age....

Occupation .....

Ambition .....

I am enclosing a stamped self-addressed envelope. Send me a membership card.

NOTE: If yuh're headin' West, an' have questions for Old Doc Trail tuh answer, enclose letter with this coupon. 3-40

THE NEW COLLEGE HUMOR 15c EVERYWHERE

Gunn yarn—PAINTED POST DEFIANCE, in which Sheriff Blue Steele and Deputy Shorty Watts fight one of the toughest battles of their lives! They're up against an ornery crew of horse thieves—and they sure do some fancy roping on the rustlers! Just wait until you read this yarn. You're sure to like it.

Another winner next issue is TEXAS GOLD, a novelet by Mojave Lloyd. In this fast-moving yarn the hero delivers a hot-lead pay-off to his foes when he takes the vengeance-trail hell-bent for action. Another yarn packed with what it takes is THE PIMA KID, a story of six-gun combat by Frank Carl Young.

Besides these headliners, there will be many other stories by your favorite authors—and the usual interesting departments.

Now, please slap your brand on the coupon printed in this department. It entitles you to join our fast-growing club, and there are no dues or fees either. Just your interest in the West and in POPULAR WESTERN Magazine are all we require for membership.

We'll send you a handsome membership card *pronto*—and remember to write Old Doc Trail and ask him any and all questions about the West. Also let's have your opinion of the stories in this issue. All letters are welcome. Readers are constantly making worth-while suggestions when writing this magazine—how about doing your bit?

Thanks to you all. *Adios!*

—THE EDITOR.

GUNSMOKE ON THE RANGE

(Continued from page 103)

"You didn't find out who shot your father, then?"

Curt gave her a crooked smile. "No. I'm kinda glad I didn't. Reckon I'm just glad we licked Beall an' his gang o' ambushers. Now we can start buildin' a range kingdom of our own."

"We?"

CURT nodded. Elaine's eyes lifted, saw the trickle of blood running from his scalp. Swiftly they dropped to the dark, sticky stain running the length of his left trouser leg.

"You're hurt! I'll get something to bandage your wounds."

"It's nothing," he said. "A bullet parted my hair an' another nicked my leg. Nothin' to make a fuss about."

(*Concluded on page 110*)

ELECTRICITY

"LEARN BY DOING" 12 weeks training

I'LL FINANCE YOUR TRAINING!

My Big Free Book tells you how we train you in 12 weeks—to start in the growing field of Electricity, by actual shopwork on real electrical machinery—not by books or correspondence. Amazing plan enables many to get training first . . . then take 20 Months to pay in small monthly payments starting 5 Months from date you start school. Experience or advanced education not needed. Many Earn While Learning. Free lifetime employment service. Diesel Engines, Radio, Electric Refrigeration and Air Conditioning instruction included. MAIL COUPON for FREE BOOK and all Facts.

H. C. LEWIS, President, COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 60-84, Chicago, Illinois
Send free book with facts on Coyne, the Pay After Graduation plan, and extra 4 weeks Radio Course now included.

NAME _____ AGE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____

MAGIC DISC
HEATS WATER IN 60 SECONDS

Any 110-Volt Line

Millions need Speed King—gives you hot water fast and cheap. Drop into any pan of water—plug into socket—in 60 seconds you have hot water. Rush your name for sample offer for use or demonstrator. Plenty cash profits for agents. No money. Just send name. Postcard will do.

Pocket Size SAMPLES FOR AGENTS. SEND NAME!

NU-WAY MFG. CO., DES MOINES, IOWA Dept. 503, Walnut Bldg.

EARN EXTRA MONEY at Home

Increase your income at home by new, simple Wentworth Tempera Colormethod. We instruct you and supply you with work. Write today for FREE BOOKLET.

Wentworth Pictorial Co., Ltd., Dept. 160, Hamilton, Ont.

HOW TO Write Stories that SELL

Mrs. Grace Blanchard had an IDEA for a story. We criticized her story, gave it a new title and told her WHERE TO SEND IT. She got a substantial check. THE FIRST TIME OUT. That is a THRILL many of our graduates have each month. Let 22 years of experience guide YOU. Endorsed by Jack London.

FREE BOOKLET "THE ART OF STORY WRITING" with explanation of our personal criticism and manuscript sales service. No obligations. Write!

HOOSIER INSTITUTE (Est. 1917) Dept. 4173 FORT WAYNE, IND.

WANTED

MEN AND WOMEN TO MAKE UP TO $32.00 A WEEK

Introducing Hose Guaranteed 4 to 8 Months

Earnings start at once! Brand new Ford given producers. Everybody buys hose. Guaranteed to wear from 4 to 8 months (depending on number of pairs) without holes, snags or runs or replaced FREE. Big repeat sales. Doris Jensen, Ill., earned $11 in 5½ hrs. received 2 new cars; Charles Mills, Minn. earned $120. in 1 week and received 2 new cars, and extra bonuses. You own hose given as bonus; send hose size. Rush name on penny card for sample outfit, details. Act Now. WILKNIT HOSIERY CO., Midway CC-48, Greenfield, O.

Send No Money

HOSE FOR YOUR PERSONAL USE. SENT WITH SAMPLE OUTFIT

THINK OF IT! I JUST MADE THIS RECORD WITH THE NEW HOME RECORDO!
IT'S WONDEFUL —AND SO SIMPLE —PLEASE LET ME MAKE A RECORD.
YES, BOB, AND IT SURE SOUNDS LIKE YOUR VOICE!

MAKE YOUR OWN RECORDS AT HOME

Now a new invention permits you to make a professional-like recording of your own singing, talking or instrument playing. Any one can quickly and easily make phonograph records and play them back at once. Record your voice or your friends' voices. If you play an instrument, you can make a record and you and your friends can hear it as often as you like. You can also record orchestras of favorite radio programs right off the air and replay them whenever you wish.

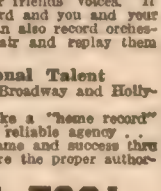
Find Out If You Have Professional Talent

The movies . . . radio . . . stage in both Broadway and Hollywood are seeking new talent.

Before spending money for an audition, make a "home record" of your voice or instrument and mail it to a reliable agency . . . you might be one of the lucky ones to find fame and success thru this easy method of bringing your talents before the proper authorities.

IT'S LOTS OF FUN, TOO!

You'll get a real thrill out of home recording. Surprise your friends by letting them hear your voice as though it were broadcast. Record a snappy talking feature. Record jokes and you will become the life of the party. Great to help train your voice and to cultivate speech . . . nothing to practice . . . you start recording at once. No other mechanical or electrical devices needed. Everything necessary included. Nothing else to buy. Just sing, speak or play and HOME RECORDO unit which operates on any electric or old type phonograph will do the recording on special blank records we furnish. You can immediately play the records back as often as you wish. Make your home movie a talking picture with HOME RECORDO. Simply make the record while filming and play back while showing the picture.



OPERATES ON ANY AC OR DC ELECTRIC PHONOGRAPHS RECORD PLAYERS RADIO-PHONE COMBINATIONS Old or New Type PHONOGRAPHS and PORTABLES

SEND NO MONEY!

Everything is included. Nothing else to buy and nothing else to pay. You get complete HOME RECORDING UNIT which includes special recording needle, playing needles, 6 two-sided unbreakable records, (equivalent to 12 records). Also included guide record attachment combination recording playback unit suitable for recording a skit, voice, instrument or radio broadcast. Additional 2 sided blanks records cost only $.75 per dozen.

COMPLETE OUTFIT

INCLUDING 6 TWO-SIDED BLANK RECORDS ONLY **$2.98**

HURRY COUPON

START RECORDING AT ONCE!

HOME RECORDING CO.
11 West 17th St., New York

Home Recording Co., Studio KD
11 West 17th Street, New York, N. Y.

Send entire HOME RECORDING OUTFIT (including 6 two-sided records) described above by return mail. I will pay postman $2.98, plus postage, on arrival. (Send cash or money order now for $3.00 and save postage.)

Send.....Additional records at 75c per dozen.

Name .....

Address .....

NOTE: Canadian and Foreign $3.00 cash with order

(Concluded from page 109)

Elaine stared at him, not entirely reassured. She was silent a moment and her face worked with inner troubled thoughts.

"Curt," she began, her voice low and strained. "How did Dad know where —to find your cattle. He seemed to know the way so well."

Curt's face was immobile, but he smiled inwardly.

"I reckon for some time he suspected that jasper, Beall, of stealin' cattle. Mebbe he didn't tell yuh he was losin' steers regular." Curt paused, astonished at the ease with which the words came. "I figger he'd been watchin' Beall all along an' before that last raid he must've discovered this basin. Probably found some o' his own beef there. Then, before he could go ridin' against Beall, the polecat ups an' raids my place."

Elaine's face cleared to a sad smile. She turned and they started slowly down the slope again. In the West the sun had dropped below the horizon, but light still lingered up on the mesa.

Pain shuddered through Curt again, but he thrust it from him. Then the girl tilted her face toward him again. Her voice choked a little as she spoke. "One more thing, Curt—darling. What was it that Dad said to you before he—he—"

Curt paused and his arm went around her slender waist.

"He asked me to take care o' yuh," he said gently. "An' that's just what I aim to do from now on."

For Rip-Roaring Yarns of the West
By Your Favorite Authors
READ

POPULAR WESTERN

EVERY ISSUE!
PACKED WITH FAST ACTION

ROMANCE RIDES THE RANGE!

For Exciting, Glamorous Love Stories of the West, Read Our Companion Magazine

THRILLING RANCH STORIES

•

FEATURING
YOUR FAVORITE AUTHORS

•

NOW ON SALE

15¢

AT ALL STANDS

FISHING TACKLE at *LOW Prices*

Send today for New 1940 Catalog listing thousands of bargains in Fishing Tackle, Baseball, Basket Ball, Golf, Tennis, Archery, Guns, Clothing and Sporting Equipment of all kinds. Top quality—***Money Back Guarantee!***

HERE ARE A FEW MONEY-SAVERS

$17.50 Bamboo Fly Rod, Alu. Case & 2 Tips	$8.95
$9.00 De Luxe Split Bamboo Fly Rod . . .	$4.95
$4.00 Split Bamboo Bait Rod, 9½′ extra tip	$2.85
$3.00 1-pc. Steel Casting Rod, Offset handle	$1.89
$2.75 1-pc. 3½′ Split Bamboo Casting Rod	$1.79
$3.75 Automatic Fly Rod Reel, light weight	$2.29
$6.50 Feather-weight Bamboo Fly Rod, 7½′	$3.95
$5.60 Double Tapered 30-yard Fly Line . .	$2.95
$1.00 doz. assorted snelled Trout Flies doz.	49¢
$1.00 doz. Ringed Trout & Bluegill Flies doz.	49¢
$1.00 assorted 6 floating Bass Bugs, 1/0 hook	59¢
Spalding matched Bobby Jones steel shafted Woods, 1940 models, ea.	$4.95
Spalding matched Bobby Jones steel shafted Irons, chrome finish, ea.	$3.95

Order any above specials C.O.D. or remit cash. FREE with $6.50 purchase or more, metal snelled hook holder or metal ribbed sport glasses. Other premiums.

FREE 136-Page Catalog

Yours for the asking. Invaluable to every sportsman. Contains the famous "Fisherman's Calendar."

GATEWAY
SPORTING GOODS CO.
131 Gateway Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

CRIME DETECTION
SECRET SERVICE AND FINGER PRINTS
SECRET SERVICE BOOK
Sent FREE
For 30 Days Reading
No Money Down—Actual Crime Cases—
If You Act Quickly—We will send you this stirring book on Crime Detection, Secret Service and Identification Work for 30 days free reading. Send no money. If you decide to keep it, then send me only $1.00. If not, return it. WRITE TODAY. Literature sent only to persons stating their age.
T. G. Cooke, Dept. 7963, 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago

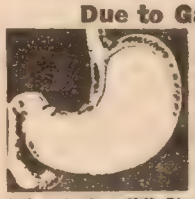
WRITE FOR PAY! TAKE THIS TEST FREE

Send for our FREE Market Propensity Test. Designed to show for which of 2,500 Paying Markets for free-lance writing you are best fitted. Write TODAY! COMFORT WRITER'S SERVICE, Dept. 413, St. Louis, Mo.

FREE SAMPLES OF REMARKABLE TREATMENT FOR

Stomach Ulcers

Due to Gastric Hyperacidity



H. H. Bromley, of Shelburne, Vt., writes: "I suffered for 10 years with acid-stomach trouble. Doctors all told me I had ulcers and would have to diet the rest of my life. Before taking your treatment I weighed 143 pounds and could eat nothing but soft foods and milk. Now, after taking Von's Tablets, I weigh 171 pounds, can eat almost anything and feel perfectly well." If you suffer from indigestion, gastritis, heartburn, bloating or any other stomach trouble due to gastric hyperacidity, you too, should try Von's for prompt relief. Send for FREE Samples of this wonderful treatment and details of guaranteed trial offer. Instructive Booklet is included. Write

PHILADELPHIA VON CO., DEPT. 929-F,
Fox Building, Philadelphia, Pa.

Kidneys Must Clean Out Acids

Excess Acids and poisonous wastes in your blood are removed chiefly thru 9 million tiny delicate Kidney tubes or filters. And non-organic and non-systemic disorders of the Kidneys or Bladder may cause Getting Up Nights, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Circles Under Eyes, Dizziness, Backache, Swollen Ankles, or Burning Passages. In many such cases the diuretic action of the Doctor's prescription Cystex helps the Kidneys clean out Excess Acids. This plus the palliative work of Cystex may easily make you feel like a new person in just a few days. Try Cystex under the guarantee of money back unless completely satisfied. Cystex costs only 3c a dose at druggists and the guarantee protects you.

DICE. CARDS.
Specialties for Magicians use. Inks, Shiners, Check-Cop, Daubs. Catalog ten cents, stamps or coin.
HILL BROS., Box T, Salida, Colo.

BUSINESS PAYS BEST
TRAIN WITH SPECIALISTS, BE A
Secretary, Social Secretary, Bookkeeper, Accountant, Stenographer, Typist. Business always offers best opportunity with advancement to executive positions of business and social standing. For TWENTY-FIVE YEARS we have specialized in this training—building better courses at less cost by Home Study. Write today for testimonial folder showing what others have done. Give age, occupation and courses in which interested.
PERRY SCHOOLS, BOX 462, BRUNSWICK, GEORGIA.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933, of Popular Western, published bimonthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1939.
State of New York, County of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared H. L. Herbert, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Popular Western, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager, are: Publisher, Better Publications, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.; Editor, G. B. Farnum, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor, None; Business Manager, H. L. Herbert, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owners are: Better Publications, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.; N. L. Pines, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. H. L. HERBERT, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 3rd day of October, 1939. Eugene Wechsler, Notary Public. My commission expires March 30, 1941.

COLT HARVEST

(Concluded from page 73)

yuh up to then. So we brought yuh here a prisoner, aiming to ask Jefferson what to do next. He came riding out to see what had happened, knew that we had gone here with the prisoner. We met him and he told us to dig a grave for you like we said we was gonna do."

"Meanwhile, Jefferson realized that

having you two alive any longer was getting dangerous to him," said Dawson. "So he put on a mask and brought the gun and knife to me. He figured that I would get loose and down yuh both when yuh came back

COMING NEXT ISSUE

•

PAINTED POST DEFIANCE

A Sheriff Blue Steele Novelet

By TOM GUNN

•

TEXAS GOLD

A Novelet of Vengeance Trails

By MOJAVE LLOYD

•

THE PIMA KID

A Six-Gun Action Story

By FRANK CARL YOUNG

•

and Many Other Stories

—and if I was killed at the same time that was all right with him, too."

"Reckon yore right," said Matt Lake. "Jefferson figured by loaning yuh the money and then having us rob yuh, yuh wouldn't be able to pay the mortgage on the girl's spread—and he could get that and then yore ranch later."

Suddenly Lake's gun roared!

Dawson ducked to one side and the bullet grazed his shoulder. He fired and Lake died from a bullet in his heart. Hardy was already gasping his last.

"And you borrowed that money for me," Molly said later when they had left the cabin to report what had happened to the sheriff. "Why, Tom?"

"Figured two spreads are better than one," said Dawson as he smiled at her. "About time yuh married me, Molly, don't yuh think?"

She nodded, her eyes shining.

HERE IT IS!

GET IT TODAY!

10c AT ALL STANDS

GUARANTEED TIRES!

GOODYEAR·GOODRICH
FIRESTONE·U.S. and
Other Standard Makes

World's Lowest TIRE PRICES

Tire users by the thousands all over the U.S.A. vouch for the Long Hard Service of our Standard Brand tires reconditioned with high grade materials and latest methods by our tire experts. Our 21 years experience makes it possible to offer tires at lowest prices, with legal agreement to replace at ½ price any tire that fails to give 12 Mos. Service.

FREE! LANTERN
With Every 2 Tires ordered

Complete with batteries and newest type reflector bulb. Ready for instant use. Strong, steady light. Useful everywhere. Order now.

EVERY TIRE GUARANTEED!

BALLOON TIRES

Size Rim	Tires	Tubes
29x4.40-21	$2.15	$1.05
29x4.50-20	2.35	1.05
30x4.50-21	2.40	1.15
28x4.75-19	2.45	1.25
29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19	2.65	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20	3.75	3.75
6.00-16	3.75	1.40

REGULAR CORD TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x3½	$2.35	$0.95
31x4	2.95	1.25
32x4	2.95	1.25
33x4	2.95	1.25
34x4	2.25	1.35
32x4½	3.35	1.45

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES
(High Pressure)

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x5	$4.25	$1.95
33x5	3.95	1.75
34x5	4.25	2.25
36x6	7.95	2.95
36x8	9.95	4.45

Size	Tires	Tubes
34x7	$10.95	$4.65
36x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	11.45	4.95
40x8	13.25	4.95

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
7.00-20	$3.75	$1.65
8.50-20	4.45	1.95
7.00-20	2.95	2.95

Size	Tires	Tubes
7.50-20	$6.95	$3.75
8.25-20	8.95	4.95
9.00-20	10.95	5.65
9.75-20	13.95	6.45

ALL OTHER SIZES — DEALERS WANTED

SEND ONLY $1.00 DEPOSIT on each tire ordered. ($3.00 on each Truck Tire.) We ship balance C. O. D. Deduct 5 per cent if cash is sent in full with order. To fill order promptly we may substitute brands if necessary. ALL TUBES BRAND NEW—GUARANTEED—

PERRY-FIELD TIRE & RUBBER CO.
2328-30 S. Michigan Av., Dept. TF29, Chicago, Ill.

ITCH

STOPPED QUICKLY

Use D.D.D. Prescription

Quick relief from itching of eczema, rashes and other externally caused skin troubles

35¢ bottle, at druggists, proves it or money back

ASTHMA

TREATMENT mailed on Free Trial. If satisfied send $1; if not, it's Free. Write me for your treatment today.

W. K. STERLINE, 830 Ohio Ave., Sidney, Ohio

USED Correspondence Courses

Complete home-study courses and educational books, slightly used. Sold, rented, exchanged. All subjects. Money-back guarantee. Cash paid for used courses. Full details and illustrated 72-page bargain catalog FREE. Write today!
NELSON CO.
C-227 Manhattan Bldg., Chicago

WANTED

ORIGINAL POEMS, LYRICS, SONGS by a recognized Music Organization. Our contracts GUARANTEE PUBLICATION, marketing; include expert collaboration, where required. WE GIVE YOU ADVANTAGES NOT OBTAINABLE ELSEWHERE. Send your material today.
MUSIC PUBLISHERS AGENCY, Dept. X-21, Portland, Oregon.

NEURITIS

Relieve Pain in Few Minutes or Money Back

To relieve the torturing pain of Neuritis, Rheumatism, Neuralgia or Lumbago in a few minutes, get NURITO, the Rx formula, used by thousands. No opiates. Does the work quickly—must relieve cruel pain to your satisfaction in a few minutes—or your money back. Don't suffer. Clip this ad now as a reminder to ask your druggist for NURITO today.

You Ask Me What I Am Doing?

I Am Getting Ready to Earn More Money . . . Preparing for a Bigger Job

I am a student of the American School, Chicago. A little more than half way through my course—already my increased knowledge has brought me promotion as a result of the hour or so a day I have been spending getting acquainted with the principles of the work I enjoy. I use only part of my spare time, so it doesn't interfere with my home and social life, and certainly helps me on the job.

I have been surprised at the practical manner in which even advanced work is explained. It is a lot easier than I had expected. I only wish I had started this plan of getting ahead a few years earlier. But when I was 18 to 20 I felt pretty sure of myself. I didn't take enough stock in what more experienced people told me about the importance of being thoroughly trained for the job I wanted.

You Can't Win If You Don't Try

American School, Dept. G-358, Drexel Ave. at 58th St., Chicago

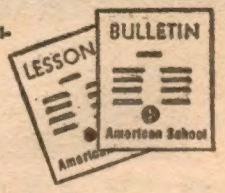
CUT ALONG THIS LINE

Try a Lesson Yourself—No Obligation

American School, Dept. G-358, Drexel Ave. at 58th St., Chicago

I have checked the line of work in which I would like a good job. Please send me without expense or obligation on my part a copy of your Bulletin and an early lesson in the field I have selected.

- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Automotive Engineering
- ☐ Automobile Repairing
- ☐ Bookkeeping and Cost Accounting
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Contracting, Building
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Diesel Engineering
- ☐ Drafting and Designing
- ☐ Electric Refrigeration
- ☐ Heating, Ventilating, Plumbing
- ☐ Professional Accounting Incl. C. P. A. Coaching
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Law
- ☐ Liberal Arts (College)
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Merchandising
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Radio and Television
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Shop Practice
- ☐ Steam Engineering



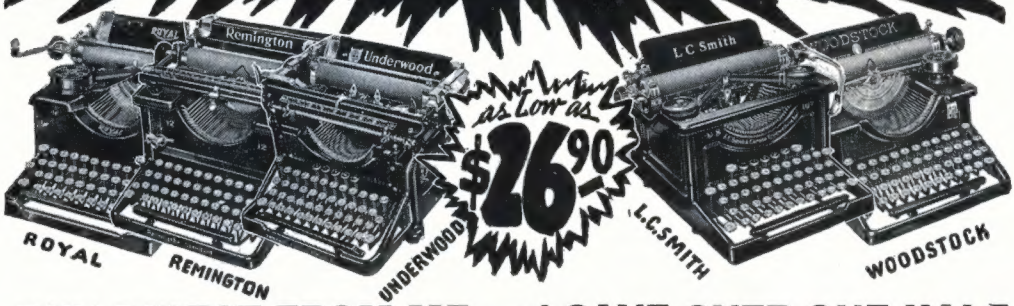
*Name*_____ *Age*_____ *Occupation*_____

*Street*_____ *City*_____ *State*_____

PRICE SMASHING SALE!

LATE MODEL • WORLD FAMOUS TYPEWRITERS

Less than 1/2 MFRS. ORIG. PRICE



BUY DIRECT FROM ME and SAVE OVER ONE-HALF

Act now—if you want to get the GREATEST BARGAINS EVER OFFERED in late model standard office size world famous typewriters. My DIRECT-TO-YOU plan brings you these late Standard Make Typewriters at SENSATIONAL LOW PRICES—**at less than ½ mfrs. orig. price. Some even as low as $26.90—less than 1/3 mfrs. orig. price!** Because I deal Direct With You—because I have no salesmen, no branch offices, no expensive stores and showrooms—I, give you TREMENDOUS SAVINGS on whatever standard make late model typewriter you choose.

ALL STANDARD MAKE LATE MODEL TYPEWRITERS

Here's your money saving opportunity of a life.ime. Think of it — you get typewriters that cost up to $110 for less than ½ the mfrs. orig. price—with amazing savings up to $72.60. Take your pick—UNDERWOOD—ROYAL—REMINGTON—L. C. SMITH—WOODSTOCK—I have them all. **All with up-to-date features and FULLY GUARANTEED.** Completely Refinished and Rebuilt with many late improvements. Do not confuse these fine late model standard office size typewriters with old, inferior models or portables. **I ship you only GUARANTEED La e Model Standard make machines at new sensationally Low ROCK BOTTOM PRICES.** I TAKE ALL THE RISK on my 10-day No Money Down Trial Plan—the typewriter you select must sell itself on straight merit test and you are the sole judge.

FREE!

ROLL-AWAY SECRETARIAL TYPEWRITER STAND

Two Me al Wings, Correct Working Height

Yours FREE with typewriter you select on this price smashing sale. *Makes every typewriter portable.* ALL Metal, mounted on casters. Can be moved by touch of finger. Big working surface, strong, compact, rigid, attractive, light weight. **Ask for details.**

10-DAY TRIAL

NO MONEY DOWN

EASY TERMS AS LOW AS **50c** A WEEK

Money-Back Guarantee

Yes, I mean it! I will ship you whatever late model standard make typewriter you choose—UNDERWOOD, ROYAL, REMINGTON, L. C. SMITH or WOODSTOCK—at my own risk so you can try it in your own home or office for 10 days. **Don't even pay one cent down**—the typewriter comes to you strictly on approval, and must satisfy you on its merit alone! You are the sole judge—no salesman, no pressure—no obligation to buy—Ship the typewriter back at my expense if you wish. Only when you have thoroughly convinced yourself that you have the biggest value ever offered—and only then—say, "I'll keep the machine." **Use easiest terms yet—as little as 50c a week (only 8c a day) or $2.00 a month!**

FREE Complete VAN ZANDT TOUCH TYPING COURSE

On this sale I give you **FREE** this famous complete 9 lesson Home Study Course, so you can learn to type quickly and easily. **SEND COUPON below for all details and BIG FREE CATALOG in natural colors — NO OBLIGATION—Mail Coupon today!**

SEND COUPON FOR BIG FREE CATALOG!

OVER 200,000 SATISFIED CUSTOMERS HAVE BOUGHT TYPEWRITERS DIRECT FROM ME

Through the same Golden Rule Policy I offer you—the Ten Day Trial, No money down. MONEY BACK GUARANTEE—and shipment on approval—I have served over 200,000 customers all over the world. **I give the savings of my direct-to-you plan to you, my customer.** You can buy with confidence on my Personal Money Back Guarantee, backed by over a quarter-million assets and 30 years of fair dealing.

SEND COUPON NOW WHILE STOCK IS COMPLETE

Don't buy a typewriter until you get my FREE BIG COLOR CATALOG showing all late standard make typewriters at amazing smashed prices! NO OBLIGATION—It costs nothing to see—so fill out coupon and mail today—while this sensational money saving sale lasts.

Mr. W. F. Clausing, President,
INTERNATIONAL TYPEWRITER EXCHANGE
231 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Illinois. Dept. 388

Please send WITHOUT OBLIGATION complete Illustrated FREE CATALOG IN COLORS, showing late model Standard TYPEWRITERS at tremendous savings, with no money down and 10-day Trial. Also Free Stand and Touch Typing course offer.

Name .....

Address .....

Town..... State.....

Above—AN ACTUAL COLOR PHOTOGRAPH. A. B. Mize of North Carolina grew some of the finest tobacco he ever raised—thanks to U. S. Government methods.

Uncle Sam, TOBACCO EXPERT!

"U. S. Gov't methods have made tobacco better than ever . . . and Luckies buy the choicer grades," says James Walker, 19 years an independent buyer.

Q. "What are these methods of Uncle Sam's?"

Mr. Walker: "They're scientific ways of improving soil and plant food . . . that have helped farmers grow finer tobacco in recent years."

Q. "And that's what has made tobacco better?"

Mr. W: "The best in 300 years . . . even though crops do vary with the weather."

Q. "You say Luckies buy the 'Cream of the Crop'?"

Mr. W: "They sure do. That's why they're the 2-to-1 choice of independent experts—warehousemen, auctioneers, buyers. I've smoked them 10 years."

Try Luckies for a week. You'll find that the "Toasting" process makes them easy on your throat—because it takes out certain harsh irritants that are found in all tobacco.

You'll also find out why . . .

WITH MEN WHO KNOW TOBACCO BEST—IT'S LUCKIES 2 TO 1

Copyright 1940, The American Tobacco Company